A BLOOD-CURDLING ROMANCE.

THE MYSTERY WHEEL-BARROW;

OR,

GABORIAU GABOROOED.

By W. HUMER FERGUSON.

AN IDEALISTIC STORY OF A GREAT AND RISING COLONY.

"*Humanum est errare.*"

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THE MYSTERY OF A WHEEL-BARROW;

OR, GABORIAU GABOROOED.

CHAPTER I.

"IN VINO VERITAS."

SAID the *Melbourne Daily Muddler* of the 28th July 18— :—

"Truth is said to be stranger than fiction (a profoundly original remark which we never fail to impress upon our readers), and the atrocious, diabolical, blood-curdling, Gaboreau-like crime committed on Thursday night or Friday morning—(we are unable to name the precise day and hour of the event, as the notes of our reporter, who should have attended a temperance conference on Thursday evening, are strangely illegible)—goes a long way out of its way to prove the truth of this remarkably serviceable saying.

"A murder of a rare and interesting species has been perpetrated under the very editorial nose by an assassin entirely unknown (a circumstance not unusual in sensational cases of murder), and remains shrouded in the darkest of mysteries, which not even the editorial mind can solve. The circumstances of the murder are in themselves so peculiar that we have conceived it our duty, in the interests of the public, to overhaul our best authorities, Du Boisgobey, Gaboroo (misspelt Gaboriau in less enlightened countries), De Quincey, James Payn, Ruskin, and Browning, and we must confess we have failed to discover a single point of resemblance between the murder in hand and any of those described in the

works of those famous sensational writers. The celebrated detective Lecoq would have looked with great favour upon the enterprising and original criminal whose acquaintance is now desired by our police authorities. The facts might be briefly stated, but we prefer to expand them to the length of several columns, to suit the make-up of the *Melbourne Daily Muddler.*

"On the —th day of ——, '18— (anno domini one thousand eight hundred and a dash), at the hour of twenty minutes to two o'clock in the morning (our contemporaries will, doubtless, be less precise in their chronology), a wheel-barrow was being propelled along Grey Street, St. Kilda, by a biped in a condition of 'modified sobriety.' The vehicle was stopped at the police station, where the propellor solicited the favour of being provided with a 'drop o' Scosh 'ot.' This being politely but firmly refused him, the man cursorily observed that 'corpses wasn't particular pleasant articles to (hic) cart about in an adjectived wheel-barrer,' and requested the pleasure of an introduction to the inspector. The formality effected, the stranger, who rejoiced in the patronymic of Roysterer, proceeded to narrate a story, of which the following are the main facts:—

"At the hour of one o'clock in the morning (chronological precision is one of the salient features of the *Daily Muddler*) he was proceeding in tranquil zigzags down Collins Street East, when the Burke and Wills monument suddenly swerved from its accustomed position, and came violently into contact with his (Roysterer's) wheel-barrow. The monument, having been properly apostrophised, retired; but Roysterer's attention was next attracted by the menacing attitude of the adjacent Scotch Church, which had posted itself in an offensive manner in front of the harmless vehicle, seemingly impervious to the great persuasive power of Roysterer's oratory. A diversion in his favour was, however, effected by the sudden appearance of a gentleman, bearing in his arms another gentleman. Both seemed to be in an elevated frame of mind. Their dress was peculiar. The gentleman, who at a later stage became defunct, wore no overcoat, while his bearer sported a light fawn-coloured dressing-gown, *which was open.* A weight of evidence

will no doubt bear upon the fact that this particular dressing-gown was open. *Why* it should be so must for the moment remain an open question. Roysterer (who also wore a tattered garment of similar pattern and hue) was accosted familiarly enough by the *monsieur en robe de chambre*: 'Hi, four-wheeler! say, old f'lah, gen'l'man beashtly tigh'; drive 'm home, 'ld f'lah!'

"'Say, chappie,' murmured the deceased, addressing his supporter, 'let'sh have Scosh 'n 'shoda.'

The two then tried to effect an entrance into the Scotch Church, but this attempt being futile, they fell to tossing for halfpence, while Roysterer started a highly-flavoured monologue for the benefit of an aggressive lamp-post at the corner. Failing to convince that luminary that its manners were 'ungen'l'm'nly in the (hic) 'xtreme,' he directed his steps or, rather, his steps directed him, towards the two gentlemen. He of the dressing-gown was at that moment gazing fixedly upon his companion's face, which was turned up inquisitively to the lamp—the only object that seems to shed any light upon the subject. 'You?' gasped the dressing-gown, ''strord'nary circumshan!' and depositing the other in the gutter, he fled in the direction of Bourke Street.

"Roysterer, bent on comforting the deceased, bent so far over him as to lose that perfect equilibrium so necessary to an upright man, and, following his bent, collapsed upon the prostrate gentleman. He was awakened to a sense of his position by his own wheelbarrow.

"'Hallo!' cried a voice, 'streetsh in a beashtly condition t'nigh'!' It was the gentleman in the dressing-gown, who, with renewed vigour, drove the barrow o'er the sleepers.

"'S'kilda! S'kilda! las' train. Shkilda! Inshide, gen'l'men!' cried he of the gown. With considerable difficulty the coatless gentleman was placed in the vehicle. With comparative ease he was 'spilt' therefrom ere the trio had gone a dozen yards. How they got as far as the Church of England Grammar School the editorial mind is puzzled to know, but they *did* get there, and that assertion and all others made in the columns of the *Daily Muddler*, must be accepted as

gospel truth, otherwise we shall never get beyond the Church of England Grammar School in the St. Kilda Road, where the fawn-coloured gentleman proceeded to interview the deceased, while Roysterer reclined upon the steps of the educational establishment just mentioned.

"'Goori, old f'lah,' said the dressing-gown, at length, with tears in his voice, 'goori, chappie,' and pressing a jubilee sixpence into Roysterer's reticent palm, he directed him (Roysterer) to convey his dear friend to Grey Street, St. Kilda; then, producing a short clay pipe which he endeavoured to ignite by means of friction on his cigar-case, he rolled back in the direction of Melbourne.

"Roysterer, having spat upon the effigy of Queen Victoria, not from any feeling of disloyalty, but in order to propitiate the invisible dispensers of luck, placed the coin in his trousers pocket and continued his journey, trundling his fare before him. Obedient to the instructions given by the generous donor of the sixpence, he put down his fare at the junction. This was easily accomplished by a skilful jerk of the wheel-barrow shafts. Receiving no thanks for his assistance, he wished the deceased 'Good morning,' and proffered some kindly advice in a language calculated to freeze the very marrow of a horse marine. Finding deceased to be quite dead, Roysterer tendered him his sincere apologies, and replaced the corpse in the wheel-barrow. He remarked that the deceased appeared to have died while in the full enjoyment of a meal composed of his own stockings. Roysterer then retraced his steps towards the nearest police station.

"Life being quite extinct, a doctor was sent for without delay. The man of science, after a lengthy examination of the body, said he was clearly of opinion that the deceased had ceased to breathe. He was not a student of Gabbero, but he had known cases in real life where death, under given circumstances, had been the consequence of a cessation of respiration. He did not for a moment imagine that the deceased would wantonly consume his own hose. The deceased had died easily, and in good spirits. Good old corpse!

"The body is that of a person of the male sex, *svelte* and whiskerless, clothed in the *débris* of evening costume.

His stockings are marked with the initials 'O. B.,' and are obviously in need of darning."

Further disclosures were reported in the *Daily Muddler* on the ensuing Monday :—

"Another wheel-barrow [ran the report] waited upon the police inspector of St. Kilda yesterday. The vehicle was accompanied by its owner, who has kindly volunteered much valuable information. The wheel-barrow is of the ordinary kind, constructed of wood, with one wheel in front. It has been inspected by our most eminent detectives, who pronounce it to be a genuine wheel-barrow. The celebrated Lecoq would have deigned to contemplate the object as a vehicle full of 'potential possibilities.' The proprietor of this now important piece of perambulating mechanism asserts that at half-past one o'clock on Friday morning a gentleman, wearing a fawn-coloured dressing-gown and a soft wide-awake hat, accosted him rather unceremoniously, by raising his right foot with considerable rapidity towards the lower portion of his (the proprietor's) back, thus causing a contact fraught with unpleasant sensations. The gentleman next overturned the wheel-barrow, which contained costly vegetable produce, and requested the owner to 'drive' him to Powlett Street 'for a bob.' Having declined to accede to this unreasonable request, he received from the gentleman in the gown *une verte réprimande* in the shape of cabbages (his own property) hurled at his unoffending head. The dressing-gown vanished from sight at the corner of Wellington Parade. The vegetables are now on view at the Museum of the Botanic Gardens. A particularly fine specimen of Victorian cabbage has been christened 'The Wellington *Chou*,' a name not invented *à propos de bottes*. Our detectives will find out where the *chou* pinches.

"This is indeed a clue worthy of Gabereau's imagination. There can be little doubt in the minds of our intelligent readers that the gentleman who accompanied Roysterer and the corpse to the Grammar School, and the gentleman who vanquished barrowman *secundus*, are one and indivisible.

"Our Sabbath meditations have led us to believe that all the parties concerned were hopelessly intoxicated ;

that the murder was in reality the result of an innocent practical joke; and it is not too much to expect that the missing gentleman will shortly make an ample apology through the columns of the *Daily Muddler*.

"If not, then the following profound reflections will be invaluable to our intelligent detectives in elucidating the mystery:—

"I. The deceased being unknown, the first thing to be done is to find out who he is.

"II. Next, it will be necessary to find out his murderer, who has unfortunately been allowed to escape.

"III. In London and Paris, cities of some importance, crimes of this kind may be committed almost daily with impunity, but Melbourne is not London, neither is it Paris.

"IV. It is important that the mystery should be solved on public grounds; as the murder takes place in a public street, in a public wheel-barrow, the public must necessarily feel public uneasiness.

"When we reflect that the criminal is 'at large, walking in our midst,' ready for the committal of another crime, whilst carefully avoiding all risks which might lead to the committal of himself, the editorial nerves and syntax are completely unstrung. Mr. James Payn, an obscure English novelist, once remarked that truth was stranger than fiction, an aphorism which has sunk deep into the editorial intellect, and, as we observed in Saturday's article, the present case is a proof of the veracity of that useful saying. In all cases of murder recorded in our columns it is our custom to criticise them from the shilling dreadful point of view, and to compare them severally with those invented by the sensational writers of French renown.

"In one of Paul de Kock's stories, a crime similar in character to the mysterious wheel-barrow murder consists of a triple murder and quadruple suicide in a bathing machine at Trouville. Du Boisgobey has written a story showing the possibility of committing a first-class murder in the topmost branches of a mango tree. The victim is then cremated by setting fire to the lower branches. The establishment of a temporary bureau in the trunk for the use of the detectives, and the frustration of their wily

schemes by means of a series of electric shocks emitted from a dynamo secretly hidden amongst the roots, are ingenious incidents of thrilling interest. But it has never occurred, even to this daring genius, to attempt the history of a murder committed in a trumpery wheel-barrow.

"We feel sure our noble detectives will acknowledge their sense of gratitude to the clever assassin who has offered them so excellent an opportunity of displaying their genius."

CHAPTER II.

THE CROWNER'S QUEST.

THE following is an inventory of the objects placed upon the table at the inquest held on the body of the deceased:—

Item.—Twopence-halfpenny in good Victorian coin, and a French halfpenny; a pawn ticket for an indispensable article of dress.

Item.—An undarned stocking rescued from the jaws of the defunct.

Item.—One bottle of Opoponax, probably secreted by deceased upon his person in order to put our eminent detectives on the wrong scent.

Item.—A clay pipe (stemless), an ounce of shag tobacco, and a match box (effigy of distinguished personage).

Item.—One glove, size 9¼, green, one button (off).

Item.—Sundry lobster claws and champagne corks.

Item.—A treatise on "Temperance Lecturing," and a copy of De Quincey's "Murder as a Fine Art."

Item.—A volume of Gabberau, with marginal notes.

Jehosophat Clawby, of the detective force, armed with a powerful magnifying glass, was present, in order, if possible, to discover a clue.

The barrowman Roysterer was the first witness called. A searching examination through Mr. Clawby's magnifying glass was made, but revealed nothing of public interest, and witness was then cross-examined by the Coroner, who used for that purpose the well-known "Vade Mecum for Coroners."

Q.—What were you doing last Thursday night on the St. Kilda road?

A.—Don't know.

Coroner.—Very good. *Q.*—Describe what you saw?

A.—I saw your honour doin' the swell with a young person as——

Coroner.—Silence, sir! With respect to the corpse—to the case in hand—what did you see?

Witness.—Werry good, your honour. *A.*—I seed two swells, werry tight.

Q.—Were you sober?

Witness.—As a bloomin' judge, your honour.

Coroner.—No comparisons of that kind, if you please. *Q.*—Can you describe the gentleman in the dressing-gown?

Witness.—My attention was principally occupied by the lamp-post at the corner, and the gentleman was in the shadow.

Coroner.—Describe the shadow.

A.—Tall, fair, thin, with long moustache, and dressin' gownd, wide-awake 'at, and bloochers.

Q.—What did he say when he placed the corpse in the gutter?

Witness.—Go an' 'ang yourself, your honour.

Coroner.—If you dare to address me in that manner, I'll commit you for contempt of court.

Witness.—That's what '*e* said.

Coroner.—He said he would commit you?

Witness.—No, yer honour, "Go an' 'ang yourself."

Coroner.—Yes, yes, I understand. *Q.*—Did he look back?

A.—No, he looked black, your honour.

Q.—Did you look after him?

A.—No, I 'ad enough to do to look after the corpse.

Q.—When did you again see the dressing-gown?

A.—When 'e came back and drove my barrer over me an' 'is mate.

Q.—Did you make any observation?

A.—Didn't I just!——

Coroner.—There, that'll do. No ornamental expressions here, if you please. *Q.*—What did you do next?

A.—Put the corpse in my barrer.

Q.—And then?

A.—Chucked it out agin.

Q.—For any particular reason?

A.—No, my lord, no. Larks, don't yer know, mere larks.

Coroner.—I thought so. *Q.*—Did you speak to the deceased?

Witness.—Didn't we just!——

Coroner.—Hush, that'll do, witness. *Q.*—Then you proceeded with the defunct towards St. Kilda?

A.—Yes, yer honour, as far as the Grammar School.

Q.—Why did you stop there?

A.—The cove in the gownd said as 'e wanted to finish the corpse's education.

Q.—Did you assist in the process?

A.—No, yer honour. The cove says, says 'e, as he'd made the diseased warm and comfortable; then 'e gives me a tanner, and a few directions, and then 'e slopes.

Q.—Did you notice his demeanour?

Witness.—His wot?

Coroner.—His demeanour.

Witness.—Didn't know he 'ad one on, your honour. If you mean 'is gownd, it was buttoned up and fixed with a rope round 'is waist.

Q.—Was his behaviour at all strange?

A.—Well, *rayther.* He says, says 'e, "You're a——"

Coroner.—Refrain from anything vulgar in my hearing, if you please. *Q.*—When did you discover that deceased was dead?

A.—When 'e alighted from my wehicle.

Q.—Did you assist him to alight?

A.—No, he wasn't smokin', yer honour.

Coroner.—I mean, did you help him out of your wheelbarrow.

A.—*Rayther*, your lordship. What do *you* think?

Coroner.—Describe your manner of assisting him.

Witness.—I jest took a run, stopped short, and elewated the shafts perpendic'ler.

Q.—Do you find that an expeditious mode of depositing your passengers?

A.—Werry much so, your worship.

Q.—Did the deceased make any observation?

A.—No, he was just too busy with 'is stockin's.

Q.—How did you find out he was dead?

A.—I tried to stand 'im on 'is pins, and he fell into my barrow agin. So I carted him to the station.

Coroner.—Thank you, witness.—Stand down.

Dr. Robert Toiquejaime Shinbone was then called. The eminent practitioner made the following deposition :—

"I am a properly-qualified surgeon dentist. I made a

post-mortem examination of the deceased. Externally, the corpse was fine and healthy, and it required much professional discernment on my part to pronounce life to be extinct. I made the usual professional experiments. I sent electric shocks up the legs, and extracted two incisors; I trod upon its toes without apology; I requested the loan of half-a-crown; and, as a decisive test, I made one of my most side-splitting jokes. Failing to elicit any sign of hilarity, I was clearly of opinion that deceased was defunct." (Applause, which was immediately suppressed.)

"I then proceeded to make a post-mortem examination. I found the customary organs in their usual places. (Hear, hear.) The auricles of the heart were situated at its base. The brain was small, and contained, amongst a mass of cellular tissue, the germ of an idea (Sensation). The stomach was full; the feet healthy. There was a slight tendency to corns on the right foot. Upon probing an important bunion a spirituous odour was emitted. Deceased was most probably not a member of the Blue Ribbon Army. It is my opinion, as a dentist, that death was caused by the inhalation of chloroform."

Coroner.—You have observed that the feet of the deceased were liable to the production of corns and bunions. Can you assert that death was not caused by the exposure of these growths after the removal of the stockings?

Dr. Shinbone.—As a professional dentist I can refute such a theory. The presence of pedal excrescences of the nature described will, at times, cause irritability of temper, and it is quite possible that the administration of chloroform while in this state would have a tendency to accelerate the fatal result.

Another wheel-barrow man was then called. He deposed:—

"My name is Clem Spankin. I remember Thursday night, as on the following day I was compelled to see a medical man, owing to contusions received in the lower extremity of my back through contact with the boot of a gentleman wearing a fawn-coloured dressing gown, who hailed me on the St. Kilda Road at half-past one o'clock in the morning, and requested me to wheel him to Powlett Street or put up with certain alternatives, and on my refusing he assailed me with my own produce and afterwards

proceeded at a great pace in the direction named with a pipe in his mouth, singing, 'We won't go home till morning,' which was essentially true, as he disappeared suddenly at two o'clock precisely at the corner of Powlett Street, at which moment the post-office clock struck the hour——" Here the witness stopped for breath.

Coroner.—Did you notice anything peculiar about the gentleman?

Witness.—No, your lordship, except that his boots were very hard. He wore a dressing-gown and a soft hat, and was fearful boozed, just like your lordship when I met your lordship on Wednes——"

Coroner (sternly).—Stand down.

The Coroner then summed up. He pointed out that deceased, according to evidence adduced, was undoubtedly dead. All the obtainable evidence was circumstantial, and, in consequence, convincing. He detailed with eloquent power the salient points of resemblance between the wheelbarrow case and several murder cases mentioned by De Quincey and Gaborault. Finally, he admitted that a wheel-barrow was not a legally recognised public conveyance, and in this he differed from the able editor of the *Daily Muddler*. He said that exposure to the cold, while using such means of transit, added to the fact that deceased was admittedly found dead in the act, apparently, of swallowing his hose, might have been the main cause of death; but, seeing that the eminent dentist had taken a different view of the matter, and had, moreover, scouted the profound corn-and-bunion hypothesis, he could only recommend the jury to give an unbiassed verdict to the effect that deceased had been maliciously, wilfully, and effectively murdered by a person preferring to remain, for the present, incognito.

The jury, having been provided with a Lindley-Murray (Victorian Edition), retired for deliberation. On their return they presented the appearance of having passed a *mauvais quart d'heure*, which the foreman explained was owing to an animated discussion on auxiliary verbs. Their verdict, he said, was in accordance with the impartial views expressed by the Coroner. A rider was added deprecating the inconvenient custom established by criminals and royalty of adopting an incognito.

CHAPTER III.

AN ALLURING BAIT.

V. R.

Murder.

PRIZE COMPETITION.

"WHEREAS on Friday, the 27th day of July, one thousand eight hundred and ——, a murder was committed of a highly sensational character. The circumstances of the crime are of a nature so dreadful and extraordinary, that it is supposed by the Victorian Government that the assassin can have had no meaner object in view than that of rivalling in daring atrocity the mysterious crimes described in the much-admired works of Gaboriau and Du Boisgobey, thus affording gratuitous material for the creation by some Colonial genius of a shilling shocker calculated to crown with glory the immortal literary achievements of our great and rising Colony.

"Taking this profoundly philosophical view of the matter, the Government have decided to offer a prize of one hundred pounds for the best sensational romance based upon the facts disclosed at the Coroner's inquest.

"Competitors' papers must be forwarded, post paid, to the Home Secretary on or before Guy Fawkes' Day, 5th November, 18—.

"The assassin, members of the Legislative Assembly, and children under ten years of age, will be excluded from the competition.

"TEETH SCALED AND CORNS CUT, 6D."*

"GOD SAVE THE QUEEN.

*We hasten to inform the intelligent reader that this is merely part of an ingenious and opportune advertisement devised by our esteemed townsman and dentist, Dr. R. T. Shinbone, and has no connection with the proclamation of the Government.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. CLAWBY'S TOOTHBRUSH.

To the genuine detective mind there is nothing so entirely satisfactory as the possession of a trustworthy inanimate confidant. The writer of this thrilling romance knew one of those useful public servants, who took unto himself a wife deafer than a post, and to whom, by word of mouth only, and sitting with his back towards her, he would confide the great unravelled mysteries of his profession. Mr. Clawby was still more discreet—he was unmarried, and his most precious secrets were shared only by his toothbrush. It was a great relief to his mind to fly betimes into his bedroom, and pour out his soul to the inanimate object of his affections. If that humble little article—which Mr. Clawby had purchased twenty years ago, and, alas! it was now all but a bristleless ruin—if that small object could have spoken, how the world would have discovered, to its infinite horror, what a particularly naughty place is Melbourne, Victoria!

Mr. Clawby was unusually polite to his toothbrush this morning, as he was wont to be when any matter of more than ordinary interest occupied his busy brain, and the troubled look he cast upon his confidant must have caused the punr object acute pain.

"I've been a 'tective well-nigh twenty year, and of all the rummy murders I never did find out, this is *the* rummiest. Dash it all!" (Here the "few sad last grey hairs" of the favourite stood on end.) "Dash it all! If I don't make no beginning I sharn't come to no end, that's a moral." (The toothbrush assented to this candid confession by observing a respectful silence.) "Listen," continued Mr. Clawby. "Here's a gentleman get's drunk—he meets another gentleman who's drunk—(they must be gentlemen, or they wouldn't get drunk). *They* meet a man who's drunk. Them's the plain facts.

Toothbrush, isn't it evident that *I* ought to get drunk too, to familiarise myself with the feelings of those three gentlemen who's drunk? You think not? Very well, then. What's the upshot? Gentleman No. 1 puts gentleman No. 2 in gentleman No. 3's barrow. Gentleman No. 3, accompanied by gentleman No. 2, carts gentleman No. 2 to the Grammar School. There gentleman No. 2 (I'll now call him the corpse) is polished off by gentleman No. 1, and left in charge of gentleman No. 3. Why did he polish him off? Ask me another. Well, it wasn't Love. No, there's no precedent in Gaboroo. Was it Theft? No; the corpse retained all his personal effects. Was it Revenge? Aha! toothbrush, there's the rub! As an experienced 'tective I didn't think of that before. If it *is* Revenge, I'll start examining the corpse's togs. If he hasn't got a clue somewhere about him, then, as an experienced 'tective, I say he ought to have. Good-day, for the present,"

Mr. Clawby's fat, "jolly" face was soon "gravely" imbedded in the clothing of the deceased. One by one he examined the garments, commenting upon them in a manner usual with 'tectives of twenty years' standing.

"Trowsers?" he grunted, "hum—baggy at the knees, three buttons off—no clue there! Coat?—very well cut coat indeed—left tail slightly torn—never mind,—any clue here?" continued Clawly, lifting the other tail. "None whatever—not a tell-tale, evidently. Shirt? Well, there *may* be a clue somewhere about this here garment, but I guess I'll leave it alone. Boots? there's a good *clou* here, sticking up where the big toe is usually located, but that ain't the one I want. Stockings? seen them already. Oh! the weskit! Come hither, sweet weskit, and be not afraid. As an experienced 'tective I guessed I should find a clue in this here weskit. A clumsy, himprovised, home-made pocket on the inside! *Torn*, too! This is what I call a clue! What are the most unlikely things he could have carried in that pocket? Change of linen? Dressing case? Hink-pot? No! certainly not, nothing but a document—an important document. Not notes, or cheques, or bills—or anything so probable as that—oh no! a valuable document. As an experienced 'tective, I am bound to think it is a document, and that

document is now in the possession of the assassin!" And Mr. Clawby, overjoyed with his discovery, executed a masterly *cavalier seul.*

"Stop!" cried he, suddenly, and, obedient to the command, his legs resumed their customary rigidity. "I've got a clue—what am I going to do with it? Let us consult the toothbrush." So, donning his hat and overcoat, Mr. Clawby returned to his abode.

"Toothbrush," said he to his bristly confidant, "I have a clue—what shall we do with it? Suppose we advertise it? No? Suppose we submit it to a syndicate of experienced 'tectives, and float a limited liability company? No? Well, we'll look at the papers, and see whether anybody wants a clue; as an experienced detective I can adopt no other course."

This advertisement suddenly met Mr. Clawby's experienced eye as he ran through the columns of the *Daily Muddler*:—

"If Oliver Black will return to Kangaroo Villa, Grey Street, St. Kilda, and pay his rent, washing and mending, and five shillings borrowed from advertiser, he will hear of something to his advantage; otherwise his property will be sold to defray portion of the expenses of this advertisement. LUBINA GABBLETON."

"Dear me!" muttered the detective, "how very extraordinary! 'O. B.'—Oliver Black, the mark on the stickings!" Who but Clawby would have found out that portentous announcement!

"The best thing I can do," he mused, "is to drop in at Kangaroo Villa, and tell Mrs. Lubina Gabbleton who I am."

CHAPTER V.

MEN IS BRUTES.

Mrs. Lubina Gabbleton was a lady whose acquaintance with persons of the male sex, throughout a checkered existence, had been mainly unsatisfactory. To her the theory of the universe resolved itself into one single proposition which she was wont to advance with unpleasant iteration: "Men is Brutes!" Everything else was of secondary importance. Given an interlocutor of whatever sex or social status, and she would propound her favourite theory ten times in an hour, and defy him or her to frame a syllogism to contravert it.

The late Mr. Gabbleton, who had early in life taken holy orders, had come out to the colony with the laudable intention of converting the heathen, and, imbued with the idea that a fair picture of domestic felicity would help to impress the aboriginal mind with the advantages of the Christian faith, he had wedded the fair Lubina, and taken her with him. Alas! shaking off the angelic meekness of maidenhood, Lubina had donned the armour of might. Du Boisgobey would say, "*Elle portait la Culotte*," but virtuous Melbourne would shudder at any attempt to translate that masculine figure. Poor Gabbleton gradually succumbed to the nagging garrulities of his erstwhile tender Lubina. The temporary place of worship he had caused to be erected was the scene of his final struggle. In a remarkable discourse he proclaimed that wifely obedience was a desirable and holy thing, and dwelt at considerable length upon the bitter scenes of domestic strife engendered by an intemperate use of words and flat-irons. No sooner had he uttered the unfortunate word "flat-irons" (with which utensils Lubina's arguments were frequently enforced) than his irascible spouse was up in arms. She laid siege to the pulpit, scaled the walls thereof, and, seizing her refractory husband by his scanty crop of hair,

hurled him from the battlements, to the intense delight of the assembled heathen, who performed a wild and warlike dance around the prostrate divine. Physically and morally shaken; without influence amongst his swarthy flock; convinced at last that his wife's argument, "Men is Brutes," must be based upon some occult truth; he took to the fire-water, against the immoderate use of which he had hitherto so frequently inveighed, and ended his days by hanging himself by the girdle of his gown to the wooden steeple of his own chapel—a pathetic example to the matrimonially-inclined. Thus himself and his ministry were suspended at one and the same time.

Having interred her dear defunct, Mrs. Gabbleton next "realised" her situation. She sold her husband's sermons by auction, disposed of the chapel as a cowshed, and gave her flat-irons to the native ladies with full directions for use. She bought an estate at St. Kilda, built a house thereon, and maintained her revenues by going out a-charing, layings-out, and lyings-in.

Victorian philosophers have proved that Adam and Eve were at the bottom of the deplorable state of things we have endeavoured to depict, so we must bow to the inexorability of fate.

Mrs. Gabbleton had one recreation, which consisted of planting the flowers of her little garden upside down. She was engaged in this favourite pursuit when Mr. Clawby made his visit.

That gentleman was artistically and appropriately disguised as an itinerant nigger minstrel. Leaning over the fence of Mrs. Gabbleton's little garden, he made a few inviting grimaces, and gave an introductory "Yah, yah."

"Git out, yer black brute," shouted Mrs. Gabbleton, hurling her trowel in the intruder's face.

"Madam," said Mr. Clawby, applying a gaudy red silk handkerchief to his now gaudy red nose, "as an experienced detective of twenty years standing, I must tell you that I am unused to——"

"Git out," interrupted Mrs. Gabbleton, "you're a himposter; you've wiped all the paint off you're nose, you have! Men *is* brutes, and you know it, drat yer! What d'yer want? and who are yer? and have yer been christened and vaccinated, yer brute?"

"Madam," said the imperturbable Jehoshophat, "I'm Mr. Clawby, an experienced detective, and I have adopted this disguise in order to conceal my calling—and the object of my calling here."

"Well?"

"May I have the honour of addressing your ladyship privately for a few moments?"

"Come in, yer brute!" growled the lady. Mr. Clawby was ushered into a neat little room, mainly furnished with antimicassars. The stranger was asked to sit down upon one. He did so. The lady invited herself to sit opposite him upon another. She did so.

"Now then, boss," said she, pulling a string protruding from her bustle, by which she appeared to control the movements of her jaws.

Mr. Clawby sighed, wiped the perspiration from his painted brow, folded his red pocket-handkerchief into the form of a mitre, put it into his hat, placed his hat upon the floor, took out his spectacles, wiped them carefully, adjusted them on the bridge of his nose, sighed again, and said—with a shrewd twinkle in his sharp grey eyes—watching the effect of his portentous words,

"It's a very fine morning, madam."

"'Oo said it war'nt, yer brute?" was the reply to this wily question.

"Mr. Oliver Black did." (Mr. Clawby scrutinized his interlocutor.)

"Let 'im show his nose 'ere, the brute, I'll give 'im what for! as he ain't paid 'is washing bill, nor 'is rent, nor 'is beer——"

"Nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is his——" interposed Mr. Clawby, mechanically.

"None of your blasphemy, yer brute; you remind me of my good-for-nothing 'usbant——"

"*Mr. Oliver Black is dead*," hissed Mr. Clawby, not heeding this outburst.

Mrs. Gabbleton turned pale with passion. "No!" she cried. "What! without giving me the usual week's notice. Men is brutes, they is! Did he suicide hisself?"

"Clever in the extreme," muttered the experienced detective. "She's been reading Gabaroux evidently.

No, my dear madam," he said aloud, "he was murdered in a wheel-barrow on the St. Kilda Road."

"What! in a open wheel-barrow in the open street?"

"I must openly confess, madam, that you have divined the truth. Tell me all you know."

"One moment, boss. A little stimulant is necessary to soothe my heart's unrest—the same being wildly beating, as it never beat before. Then pass me yonder bottle, boss, in mercy, I implore." Mr. Clawby, touched by this poetic appeal, rose, and taking the bottle of Old Tom, applied his lips to the orifice. "Drink deeply, or touch not," said he, as he took an encouraging swig of the vivifying liquor, and passed the bottle to Lubina.

"Men is brutes," she observed; "'oo told you to ingurgitate my juniper, yer brute?" Without waiting for a reply she absorbed the remainder of the comforting liquid. Mr. Clawby resumed his seat, and the conversation continued in the following manner:—

"I'll make a clean breast of the whole concern, you being an experienced detective, well up in Gabareau and De Quincey, wich I can't say as I studies much, tho' I have heard as they is almost as interesting as Mr. Zoler's *Terre* and Mr. Bunyan's *New Pilgrim's Progress*, which Mr. Black used to read of a Sunday—but that ain't 'ere nor there. Listen, yer brute. Some months ago, findin' the lyin's-in got slack and layin's-out weren't so brisk as they used to be, I had an idea that letting out lodgings would increase that monetary increment, without which a solitary gentlewoman like myself, habituated to the aesthetic refinements and cultured ease of polite society, *ce monde spirituel où*——"

"Drop it, old girl," implored Mr. Clawby; "please remember that I am a detective of twenty years' standing, and, in consequence, unused to my present constrained posture. Have the goodness, therefore, to curtail, as far as possible, all unnecessary minutiæ savouring of self-aggrandisement. Redundancies and garrulities of speech are particularly obnoxious under existing circumstances, and——"

"Shut it, boss," interrupted Mrs. Gabbleton; "talk Hinglish. You hain't the Heditor of the *Hargus*."

"Go on," said Mr. Clawby.

"Well, I put an advertisement in the papers, an' Mr. Holiver Black took my rooms."

"Any peculiarity about his appearance, Mrs. Gabbleton?"

"Well, yes; he had a hexcresence like a hairy raspberry on his nose, the brute——"

"The very man," murmured Clawby. "O triumph of detective skill! Jehoshophat, thou art henceforth famous! Did the corpse have any friends?"

"He warn't a corpse then, silly."

"Very true," said Clawby, "but——"

"He had a hikey lot of acquaintances, such as even my brute of a 'usband—peace to his ashes!—would have spurned. Mr. Black paid five shillings in advance, and told me he was going to marry a heiress. He had one chum in particular—a Mr. Lessland—just a fair brute, 'andsome as regards his pusson, but a hikey character, you bet."

"Ah! When will this gentleman call, d'ye think?"

"Well," said Mrs. Gabbleton, satirically, "as there's an experienced detective wanting him, no doubt he'll come to-night."

"Exactly. The immortal Gabbèrou would have effected an opportune interview at this very moment. Anything else?"

"Yes. About two weeks ago a tall cove came here in a soft 'at and dressing-gown."

"The very man," again muttered Mr. Clawby. "Jehoshophat, thou art immortal. Well, what did he do?"

"He just went and raised Cain. Mr. Black and him went at it hammer and tongs, and when I went upstairs to hintercede, the dressing-gown cove busts open the door, the brute, and hollers out—'Mine!'"

"You?" exclaimed Clawby.

"No, sonny, I've been married. Once shy, twice bit. He hollers out, 'Mine!' then Mr. B. calls out, 'No it ain't, it's mine!' and t'other yells out, 'Mine, I tell you, you scoundrel; there's my initials on the tail. Why, if you dared to put it on your carcase I'd murder you in the open street in a wheel-barrow, which is the most unlikely place I can think of at the present moment.' Then he goes out, banging the door, and Mr. Black shies his boot

after him, which, it being in the dark, caught me on the nose and shed my gore."

"Did Mr. Black make any remark?"

"Modesty forbids me to repeat his repellent expression," said Mrs. Gabbleton, with a pious air.

"That'll do," said Mr. Clawby dryly. "What was the stranger's name?"

"Ask me another, old hoss."

Mr. Clawby was satisfied.

He rose to his full height (5 feet 3½ inches in his boots) and blushed with conscious pride.

"Mrs. Gabbleton," said he, "as a 'tective of twenty years' standing—an ardent student of the great Gabioreau—a humble worshipper at the shrine of the immortal Lecoq—I thank you! This far-seeing nose, languishing beneath a dissimulating layer of burnt cork and butter, is worthy to rank with the olfactory organ of the greatest gentleman of the profession. Henceforth I am immortal! The man in the dressing-gown—listen, O woman!—the man in the dressing-gown murdered the defunct, and *I*, the great Clawby, have discovered him!"

"What's *your* opinion?"

"Madam," said Mr. Clawby, with awful majesty of utterance, "*there's something at the bottom of this affair*;" and, bowing low, the famous detective passed through the portal of Kangaroo Villa. Mrs. Gabbleton, looking wistfully after him as he strode away, smiled and sighed. "Men *is* brutes as a rule," she murmured softly, "but this blessèd nigger is just lovely!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE GREAT GRIEF OF THE ARISTOCRAT.

AN earnest conversation with his toothbrush left little doubt in Mr. Clawby's mind as to the identity of the murderer. The gentleman in the dressing-gown had carried out his murderous threat with such promptitude and despatch that it now only remained to request the favour of his acquaintance. The toothbrush acquiesced in this arrangement. Gentlemen there were, certainly, and many of them, who might answer to the description given, but Mr. Clawby had made up his mind, so there was nothing further to be said. Mr. Lessland, as in duty bound, would turn up at Kangaroo Villa at the proper moment, and would furnish the most comprehensive information as to the habits of the deceased, his friends, and his enemies. So Mr. Clawby (disguised as a Beef-eater from the Tower of London, freshly arrived in Melbourne to represent Her Majesty during the Jubilee festivities) hired a brougham, and drove to Kangaroo Villa.

Mrs. Gabbleton, after kissing his feet, conducted Mr. Clawby to the late Mr. Black's apartments. The detective glanced round, and at once summed up the defunct. Detectives always do that.

"Just a real masher," said he; "portraits everywhere —bold young things galore, jockeys, horses, Sullivan and Mitchell, Queen Victoria, Tootsie Vaughan, and the late lamented Lord Beaconsfield."

The lamp-glasses were of a delicate pink colour, and a soft rosy light shimmered over the Kidderminster carpet like a perfumed smile upon the purple lips of dawn. Mr. Clawby's inquisitive eye was attracted by the heterogeneous assortment of tobacco pipes, arranged in a rack over the mantle-shelf. He took one of them down, filled it, and dreamily lighting up with one of Lubina's curl-papers, continued his investigations.

"Rather fond of the—hum—ladies, I observe," said he, with an amatory wink at the gentle Lubina.

"Yes, the brute," replied she, dryly, "and the less they had on the better he liked 'em—the himpudent hussies! You won't find *my* portrait there—wich I *am* in the 'abit of concealing my anatomy from the gaze of men, the brutes."

"Ah! madam," said Mr. Clawby with a sigh, and kissing the fair hand he held within his own, "full many a flower was born to blush unseen"

"Drop *that*, old hoss, I'm no chicken, *you* bet—though you *are* just delightful in them red breeks."

Though a detective of twenty years' standing, Mr. Clawby had still a soft place in his heart. He turned and strolled over to the library, chiefly with the object of concealing his emotion. The library, so called, consisted of a few old numbers of the "Pink 'Un," from whose pages Mr. Clawby read several poetical extracts to the chaste Lubina, whose face flushed with *naïf* pleasure at the piquant naughtiness of that high-toned print. There was also a volume of Zola, but Mr. Clawby flung it from him as though defiled. "Zoler!" cried he; "out upon him for a ribald serpent, polluting the pure air of our great and rising colony—I trample him beneath my feet! But thou, Gabareaux, over whose golden page my heart and brain have throbbed in unison,—is there no work of thine immortal pen upon these scanty shelves? I am undone! I am undone!"

"Oh! Mr. Clawby and me *alone* with you," said Mrs. Gabbleton, with a modest blush.

"Sweet Lubina, fear not, my gorgeous raiment is intact." Mr. Clawby flung himself at her feet, and declared his ardent and undying passion for his chaste Lubina.

"What *are* you up to Black?" exclaimed a voice; "private theatricals, eh?"

Mr. Clawby sprang to his feet, and resumed the calm, collected air of a detective of many years' standing.

The new arrival consisted of a tall, doll-faced young man, pink and white in hue, with straw-coloured curls and moustaches. He wore a costume of the largest chess-board pattern, and the most fashionable ready-made cut.

This studied elegance of dress, and the short clay pipe he held between his teeth, combined to give him a strikingly aristocratic appearance.

"Where's Black, mother?" he asked, sitting astride the piano, and puffing his smoke in Mr. Clawby's face with nonchalant grace.

"Do you mean to say you haven't seen him lately?" said the wily one.

"Who the devil are you, old blazes?" returned the new-comer.

Mr. Clawby, unruffled by this unseemly query, stood gazing dreamily at the handsome young aristocrat, who presently said, nonchalantly—

"I presume, my friend, you are a hopeless lunatic, to whom Black has offered an eleemosynary abode for the purpose of psychological research?"

Mr. Clawby advanced boldly to the piano, struck a few chords with a masterly indifference to accidentals, and, with great taste and expression, sang the following

RECITATIVE AND ARIA.

When summer snows shall blanch the vales of Ind,
And mellowing melons bend the hawthorn bough;
When ruminants shall roam the watery wastes,
And periwinkles thrum the lovesome lute;
When limpets, chorusing soft Lydian airs,
Shall 'witch the world with wondrous horsemanship—
Then say the fame of Clawby is no more!

Lecoq (you know your Gaboreau)
His genius inherits;
His heye is like the heagle's,
His nose is like the ferret's.

But, Clawby too, a goodly crew
Of "wanted" ones inweigles:
His nose is like the ferret's,
His heye is like the heagle's

Tho' once I "took" a guileless "dook"
Thro' taking too much "sperrets,"
My heye *is* like the heagle's,
My nose *is* like the ferret's.

Some I beguiles with words and smiles
Like syrup, sir (*not* Siegel's)—
My nose is like the *ferret's*,
My heye is like the *heagle's*.

The world, with tears, for countless years
Shall catalogue my merits :—
My *heye*, that's like the heagle's,
My *nose*, that's like the ferret's.

"Bravo, Blazes!" cried the aristocrat. "Bravo! didn't think you had it in you. Now then, tell me, where's Black? What's he been up to? Too pressing in his attentions to Mrs. Gabbleton?"

"Heaven forbid," cried Mr. Clawby, with emotion.

"Oh, the brute!" screamed Lubina. "Me? a poor innocent, modest, retiring widow!"

"Do you happen to know where Black is to be found?" asked the cautious detective.

"I do *not*, Blazes. I've been up country, on a—on a temperance mission, and——"

"Good young man," said Clawby, touched to the heart. Then suddenly—"Black's dead." The aristocrat collapsed.

"Why, in the name of Scott, didn't you say so, you blazing idiot, instead of pestering me with your damnably impertinent questions. Good old Black! Dearest and best. Oh me! oh me! of course *I* never read the papers; everybody else did—alas! alas! We were brothers, figuratively speaking" sobbed the aristocrat; "we shared everything, I especially—boo-hoo, boo-hoo——"

"Noble heart!" groaned the Beefeater, rocking himself to and fro.

"We came here on the same boat—boo-hoo——"

"Poor dear!" moaned Mrs. Gabbleton.

"——Many's the time we went 'Thomas Dodd' for the hebdomadal clean shirt—boo-hoo, boo-hoo——"

"Sweet sympathetic soul!" gurgled Mr. Clawby.

"——Many's the time we sparred three rounds for the handkerchief—boo-hoo!—returned in its pristine purity—boo-hoo!—from the wash——"

"Let brotherly love continue," ejaculated Mr. Clawby, through his tears.

"——In fact, Blazes," said Mr. Lessland, growing calm, "in fact I was with him almost to the last."

"Oh the brute!" shrieked Lubina.

"We were like brothers," continued the young man. "Is it not natural that I should have been with him in his last hours? Don't think I did the job—not I! Fact is, Blazes, we were awfully tight, don't yer know, old fellow. You know the song—

'We all got mixed, and had a jolly spree,
Thro' going with the missus to the ju-bil-lee.'

Chorus please."

The chorus floated on the stilly evening air like a mystic funeral dirge.

The aristocrat continued:—"It is as well in a case like this, don't yer know, to throw aside social scruples. We did. Poor Black! He was very argumentative—insisted on proving the presence of microbes in the moon, and all that sort of thing, don't-yer-know,—came to blows with a pump for refusing to enter the club with us—Dressing-gown Club, you know, Blazes. Then we visited some friends, passed the flowing bowl, and so on, until poor Black left us in charge of his dressing-gown, and went out, saying he had an old score to settle with pa Frecklenose at the 'Kilted Opossum,' *you* know, Blazes. Well, shortly after, waiter requested me to retire. I did so—under the table. Then they swept me out, social scruples and all. I remember smiling tenderly at Black's dressing-gown on my arm. 'Lovely ni', my dear, for stroll home,' said I. Then, all of a sudden, throwing aside all my remaining social scruples, I rolled into the gutter. Next morning I found myself in bed, fully attired for a country trip. I left town at an early hour, and sought for peace in solemn and solitary communion with Nature."

"Great and noble soul!" said Mr. Clawby, with tears in his voice.

Seizing an album, the aristocrat rapidly turned the leaves until he came to the portrait of a young lady. "Peggy Frecklenose!" he explained; "Miss Frecklenose, Blazes—Blazes, Miss Frecklenose!"

Miss Frecklenose had been "taken" in a costume both charming and original. Clad in a robe of white material, "mystic, beautiful," the sleeves turned up to her dimpled elbows, she brandished the trusty staff of a special constable. Her fair hair, hanging upon her forehead in luxurious masses of fringe, was surmounted by a policeman's helmet. What struck the beholder as being her principal charm was the naive, ingenuous expression informing her whole physiognomy, chiefly due to a delicately-balanced obliquity of vision, which lent to her eyes a *je-ne-sais-quoi* of uncertain *farouche* tenderness. Underneath this graceful portrait were the following lines, scrawled in Black's irregular handwriting:—

> Not for thee, inane Fitzdoodle,
> Blossom'd all these beauteous charms,
> 'Ware the staff! Wouldst thou canoodle
> Pallas pale with Love's alarms?

"Black was passionately fond of her," explained Mr. Lessland, "but Peggy was madly in love with Fitzdoodle; hence these beautiful lines—boo-hoo—the beautiful lines of my dear friend;" and the aristocrat sobbed afresh.

"This Fitzdoodle wore a dressing-gown occasionally, did he not?"

"Ya-as, great swell, don't yer know; very handsome, Blazes; in fact, resembled me awfully, don't yer know. Called here not long ago; raised disreputable shindy, Blazes; dreadful character!"

"The very man!" said Mr. Clawby to himself.

"Well, Blazes, I'm o.p.h. Unless the exigencies of this remarkable drama should require my presence, I shall disappear for a short time. But I'll do what I can to help you, boo-hoo"—(here the aristocrat broke down)—"to find the murderer of my dear dead friend. Of

course, you have your 'spicions now—Fitzdoodle, eh, Blazes?"

Mr. Clawby placed the thumb of his left hand to the tip of his astute nose, and, spreading out his four fingers, said, in a hoarse whisper—

"P'raps 'e did, p'raps 'e didn't. Eggs is eggs. As an experienced detective of twenty years' standing, *I have an idea*, and I mean to stick to it."

CHAPTER VII.

LUCK.

IF King Midas had lived in the present century he would undoubtedly have recounted his experiences in a letter to the editor of the London *Daily Telegraph*. As a natural consequence he would have been interviewed by reporters numberless as the golden sands of Pactolus, who would have begged his Phrygian majesty to turn their note-books, pencils, top-hats, umbrellas, etc., into the shining yellow metal we alternately curse and bless—bless, when in our possession, and curse, when we see it in the hands of *autrui*. But, fortunately, King Midas is as dead as Queen Anne, only more so, inasmuch as he never existed. Who can conceive the consequences of such a power as his? Of a certainty his majesty would have taken out a patent, and placed himself in the hands of a powerful syndicate for the formation of a limited company to be called the Royal Phrygian Transmutation Company, Limited. What a host of kings, queens, princes, dukes, and royalty flunkies of all degrees we should see on the board of directors. "Will your majesty be good enough to step round to our royal house of Windsor, and turn our goods and chattels into gold on the occasion of our jubilee?" "Will your majesty oblige by kicking the seat of our princely Edinboro' trousers in order to enhance their value in the eyes of the Hebrew merchant to whom we usually sell our royal cast-off clothing?" *Passons! passons!* the golden calf would still be worshipped, though angels trod our Victorian streets—though Archangels smuggled through the House of Assembly a bill for the free transit of mortals to the paradise of the blest!

Frank Frecklenose never wrote a letter to the editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, but he was nevertheless the luckiest man in Australia. Even in his babyhood his luck was

proverbial. The mouldiest farthing he inadvertently swallowed, would, after the administration of a persuasive emetic, turn out to be a halfpenny.

Frecklenose had arrived in Australia with the customary eighteenpence, penknife, and bit of string. With this insignificant capital he had laid the foundation of his fortunes—at first gold-digger, then squatter, and afterwards proprietor of a cattle wash, which had the peculiar efficacy of leaving sheep and oxen hairless and woolless as looking-glasses. A large sum was subscribed by appreciative settlers and presented to the enterprising Frecklenose on the sole condition that he consented to "run" his cattle wash in a neighbouring colony. He next went to New Zealand, where he sold his patent rights to the Government, who retailed the preparation (as an invigorating hair-wash) to the Maoris. An appreciable reduction in the native population having resulted, Frecklenose was honoured with the thanks of the House of Representatives, and a grant of land in Victoria. Here his genius culminated in the invention of an Electrical Incubator and Chicken Raiser.

The mechanism of that wonderful contrivance is worthy of a brief description. Young and unimpeachable hens, with motherly hearts and domestic instincts, were first decoyed by a fascinating array of chalk eggs into a wooden enclosure. Seized instantly by an invisible automatic fork, the birds were jerked into an adjoining apartment, where they were sumptuously fed with "Bird's Egg Powder." The meal finished, they were next marshalled into an amphitheatre and lectured severely by a democratic rooster on the evils arising from "unearned increment." This lecture rarely failed to produce an effect, and a final exhortation to "lay to" was generally obeyed with a unanimous cackle of assent. By means of a sliding arrangement the eggs were shunted into the incubators and electrified. The discomfort experienced by the embryo chicks speedily induced them to quit their shelly tenements. The final part of the process, that of fattening, was easily accomplished. An award of prizes of choice worms created a healthy spirit of competition, and ambitious chicks became comparatively corpulent in less than twenty-

four hours. Hens refusing to "lay to," or even one, were severely censured, thrown aside by an ingenious and discriminating piece of mechanism, and convorted into shoe leather for the *chaussure* of our Melbourne Volunteers.

Frank Frecklenose became rich, married a Melbourne beauty, and begat one child, his daughter Peggy Frecklenose, who, being charming as her name, and an heiress withal, was much sought after by aspiring young Melbournites and barons. These she treated with high-bred *froideur*. The prince of her fairy tale had not yet come. Had he never come, Peggy had resolved, like every young woman of her age, to do without, retire into a convent, or set up as a lady novelist of misanthropic persuasions; but the appearance of Fitzdoodle O'Brier dispelled this happy dream, as well it might have done. Fitzdoodle entered Frank Frecklenose's "Bottle and Jug Department," and thus sailed into this thrilling history. Tall, thin, and hungry enough he looked, as he tendered his last threepenny-bit to the landlord of the "Kilted Opossum."

Fitzdoodle was of noble Irish blood. He had left nothing behind him in the old country save a few paltry bills (unpaid), and his blessing. The latter was bestowed upon the family Banshee, a pathetic and solemn sprite, who had been boycotted by the Banshee Land League for having haunted the proud ancestral halls of the O'Briers. Frank Frecklenose, to whom Fitzdoodle brought letters of introduction from nobody in particular, was pleased with the easy and nonchalant air of the young Irish gentleman as he threw the remnant of his old world fortune upon the counter and called for "Three of Home Rule." Frecklenose took him at once to his colonial bosom, gave him soft raiment, and lent him gold (at interest not exceeding the current bank rate by more than 20 per cent.), advised the purchase of a station (he had one to sell), and cemented the friendship by a liberal allowance (to himself) of "Frecklenose's Special."

As he crawled upstairs that night, Mr. Frecklenose indulged in loud operatic "asides," both mirthful and melodious. He informed his wife, in lyric numbers, that "something 'shempted, shumbody 'done,' he earned a nightsh repoge." Then extinguishing the candle with his

night-cap, and secreting his slippers under the pillow, he crept into the fond embrace of his loving spouse, whose "night's repose" was perhaps less blissful than her husband's, owing to the fact that Frank's feet still adhered tenaciously to his boots.

Fitzdoodle's fortune gradually increased. He sold five mangy sheep and a sterile cow, and bought cattle more amenable to the exigencies of breeding. He apostrophised the family Banshee in a stirring poem of four cantos, treating in turn of (1) The Restoration of the Castle of the O'Briers; (2) The return of the magnificently-rich Fitzdoodle to his native land, bearing with him his blushing bride; (3) The cure of dry rot in sheep; and (4) The study of Gaboroux as applied to the Irish question.

'Twas after the introduction to Fitzdoodle's muse that Peggy Frecklenose conceived a passionate love for the poet—a love that was returned with Irish impetuosity difficult to withstand. Everything was so far arranged that Fitzdoodle had purchased an emerald ring (which in colour vied with Peggy's gentle eyes) and was on the point of "speaking to Pa," when Peggy's mother (who has to be got rid of somehow at this point of our story) died without a moment's notice, out of sheer annoyance at not being allowed a *rôle* in the great *Mystery of a Wheel-Barrow*. Mr. Frecklenose confessed to a certain sense of vexation at the suddenness of the occurrence, for he tenderly loved his deceased wife, and spared no expense at the funeral. *Now* all his affections were to be centred in his daughter, so he adopted a stern and sad countenance, occasionally diversified by a faint "wintry smile."

The grave and impetuous Fitzdoodle was not to be baulked by any such untoward event as the death of Mrs. Frecklenose. He gave way to no outward demonstration of grief, though robbed of the future watchful care of a mother-in-law, but went straightway to Frecklenose for that worthy gentleman's consent. The fates again interposed, for the impetuous O'Brier became suddenly aware that Peggy was loved by another—another Richmond in the field. The impertinent person who dared thus to traverse his matrimonial designs was no other than Mr. Oliver Black.

Frecklenose, to whom that gentleman was by letters recommended, instantly took him to his colonial bosom. He justly esteemed him as a customer of considerable stomachic power. So the other Richmond in the field soon became a favoured *habitué* of the "Kilted Opossum," much to Fitzdoodle's displeasure. Black shewed evident signs of becoming "mashed" on Peggy. He purchased her choice bouquets, composed for her a curiously-wrought acrostic, and, with an amorous smile, chucked her familiarly under her dimpled chin. Peggy coquetted in a business-like way with the handsome "masher," but inwardly vowed she would never, never be his bride unless Fitzdoodle should happen to change his mind. Many and many were the glasses that Mr. Black took with the landlord of the "wintry smile," and very large indeed was the slate upon which his nightly score was marked up, until at last he ventured to declare his passion to Peggy, and then to her father, who, much to Miss Frecklenose's surprise, promptly gave his consent and his blessing, and said he considered the affair settled.

Mr. Black was in the seventh heaven. He was admitted to the sacred precincts behind the bar; appropriated superfluous small change, and borrowed half-crowns from the till with impunity. His active services were even at times called into requisition in the "Bottle and Jug Department," when business was brisk, and the aristocracy of St. Kilda flocked to the "Kilted Opossum." It was on one of these occasions that open hostilities were declared between Fitzdoodle and the insinuating Oliver.

Mr. O'Brier had called for a cigar, which Oliver, with an obsequious smile, handed to him between thumb and forefinger, requesting to know at the same time whether he (Oliver) should "light it for him." Fitzdoodle, in reply, asked if Mr. Black objected to have his nasal organ *flattened* by the application of his (Fitzdoodle's) fist to that portion of his anatomy. Silence, they say, gives consent, so Mr. O'Brier, eliciting no answer, at once "came to terms" with the proboscis in question, and left its owner stretched upon the ground. Then, not forgetful of the better part of valour, he disappeared without even a "good night" to the adorable Peggy. When

Fitzdoodle was well out of sight and hearing, Black rose to his feet and challenged the place in which O'Brier had stood to "come on like a man!"

Having thus courageously vindicated his honour, he put on his hat and walked home.

Shortly after this dreadful encounter Mr. O'Brier had a serious difference with his washerwoman. A useful item of the impetuous Irishman's underclothing, upon which that gentleman set great store, was missed from the weekly contingent of clean linen. On investigation he found to his horror that the missing article had been sent by mistake to his rival. Terrible thoughts flitted through Fitzdoodle's excited brain as he flew in hot haste in the direction of Kangaroo Villa to claim his property. Of the quarrel that ensued, and the awful threat uttered by the impetuous Fitzdoodle, the gentle reader has already been informed; but who shall describe the mad rage of the Irishman when he discovered that *three* buttons had been wrenched from his belongings? Who can picture it? Ask of the winds!

After this stormy interview O'Brier calmed down, and "went for" Frecklenose, spoke of his love for Peggy, and Peggy's passion for himself. The tender Peggy seconded her lover in his prayer for the paternal blessing, and (we record it with tears) supplied her widowed parent with a large quantity of grog, in order to dispel the "wintry smile," and moreover soothed his chafing spirit with a tripe supper and a peptic and hypnoptic reading from "Sordello." The desired effect was at last produced. Oliver was anathematised, and Fitzdoodle installed in his place as the accepted lover of the devoted Peggy.

When Oliver heard this (during several days he had remained in bed with generous unguents upon his injured nose), he threatened to transfer his custom to another house. Mr. Frecklenose, in reply to this awful menace, appealed to the formidable score upon the slate (Oliver had several times obliterated this record of his liabilities), and mentioned also the strange *anœmia* with which the till had recently suffered, adding finally that Mr. Oliver Black was welcome to go anywhere he pleased, even to a certain region famous for its absorption and concentration of caloric. Alas! That very night Black was being

trundled in a wheel-barrow towards St. Kilda—a dead and lifeless corpse!

Frank Frecklenose made his customary balance-sheet, and finding the profits of the "Kilted Opossum" conspicuous by their absence, warmly congratulated himself on the dismissal of his aide-de-camp. He gave a grand dinner to celebrate the event, and to afford the aristocracy of St. Kilda an opportunity of observing his "wintry smile."

It was a lovely evening, composed of silver moonlit water, distant bay, gentle breezes, with "fresh" and "salt" odours according to taste, playing around a few tropical plants (probably to keep themselves warm). The French windows which "led on" to the verandah "let them in." It was a grandiose and noble picture, suggested by a valentine received by the author in the halcyon days of youth. The dinner consisted of—but we need not enumerate the various *plats* of the elegant *menu*, written in Peggy's largest round. Suffice it to say that the soup (*potage aux Pommes à l'Australienne*) was just being removed when a late guest, arriving at that moment, claimed his share, with an apology and a smile. Being of an obliging nature, he dispensed with the usual *couvert* and took his soup direct from the tureen, causing much amusement amongst the assembled guests by his unavailing efforts to force the ladle wholly into his mouth.

"Reminds one of Oliver Twist and the brimstone and treacle spoon," said Mr. Caldron, one of the greatest wits and most brilliant lawyers of all the Australias. While the guests are splitting their sides at Mr. Caldron's apt comparison, we shall have time to observe that the late comer was Mr. Leo Tol-de-Rolleston, a young man about town, who wore unimpeachable indispensables and immaculate neckties, scribbled for the *Daily Muddler*, knew everything and everybody, and was invariably ready to assert that fact. Previous to his appearance, Frank Frecklenose's guests had drifted for the seventh time into a comparative analysis of the weather, but at the aspect of Mr. Tol-de-Rolleston the company brightened up immediately.

"Oliver and brimstone!" ejaculated the new-comer, as

he extended the empty ladle to be shaken by the eager outstretched hands. "Oliver and brimstone! Poor Oliver will probably have more brimstone now than he may reasonably be expected to care about." This enigmatical speech produced the desired effect of awakening curiosity.

"Any news, Tol-de-Rolly?" questioned Frecklenose.

"News, of course I have; news of all sorts and colours—scandals, elopements, robberies, jobberies, burglaries, rapes, and murders."

"O horrid man!" screamed Peggy Frecklenose, a faint blush mantling on her cheek.

"Haven't you heard the latest news?" cried Leo the Irrepressible.

Now, as no one knew *what* the latest news was, it naturally follows that they couldn't say that they had. When this profound conclusion had been reduced by Mr. Caldron to syllogistic form, and finally established, Mr. Tol-de-Rolleston felt himself at liberty to communicate to the company the important piece of news locked up in his powerful brain.

"Well," he said, "the wheel-barrow has yielded up its secret—the murderer is known to you all."

A scream went up from the convives, and frightened eyes were everywhere turned upon each other with suspicious obliquity.

"No!" said their informant; "I didn't mean the murderer, I meant the victim."

"Lor, how you do frighten one!" simpered Peggy, smiling. "I'm sure Fitzdoodle went blue in the face."

"Did I?" asked O'Brien, innocently. "Well, I know whom he means, don't you see; he means Black—my rival Black."

"You needn't spoil a fellow's story," said Tol-de-Rolleston, in an injured tone. "How did you know? may I ask."

"I didn't know; it was merely the result of my superior intuitive perception of the tangible and intangible, abstract and concrete."

"Asphalte and concrete be hanged," said Tol-de-Rolleston, impetuously.

"And the assassin, too," added Peggy, filled with just wrath. Black ought to have died by his own act out of

grief for his unrequited passion, she thought. That would have been strictly in accordance with the established canons of Victorian romance. Tol-de-Rolleston continued his narrative :—

"A 'tective fellow, named Clawby, found it all out. Cleverest 'tective since Lecoq, don't yer know—knows everything."

"I'm sorry to hear it," said Frecklenose—a remark that nobody noticed, as it is made solely with the object of mystifying the intelligent reader of this thrilling story.

Several hours were pleasantly whiled away in the discussion of the engrossing subject, but Fitzdoodle O'Brier sat moodily cracking nuts, seemingly bent on finding the whole mystery in a nut-shell. The veracious Leo now fetched from the backyard the wheel-barrow kept for the convenience of over-festive *habitués* of the "Kilted Opossum." He manufactured a realistic corpse, using for the purpose a French roll and a serviette. He then personated in turn the honest Roysterer and the mysterious assassin. He throttled the French roll with savage energy; then, smoking a cigarette and humming the "Old Hundredth," he reeled round the table to illustrate the diabolical *sangfroid* and buoyant spirits of the murderer. This admirable pantomime elicited the unbounded applause of the company, and a winning smile from Peggy Frecklenose. Mr. Tol-de-Rolleston next disguised himself as a 'tective, and after a close inspection of a supposed trail, leading underneath the sofa, arrested several of the guests on suspicion. A cupboard containing liqueurs was subjected to a searching investigation. Caldron complimented the irrepressible on his remarkable talent. "The man who murdered Black," said he, "though a very clever criminal indeed, and a man whose acquaintance I should esteem it an honour to claim, would very soon succumb to your detective genius, Tol-de-Rol." Leo smiled superior, while Caldron, who was a very "big pot" in criminal matters, warmed to the subject. He even became epigrammatical. "The place chosen by the assassin for the committal of the crime was a very safe one from the fact that in everyone's opinion but my own it would be a very unsafe one—which, of course, makes it all the safer.

Have you ever read Gaboreau, De Quincey, Du Boisgobey, Jeremy Bentham, Lavater, and Emerson, and a host of other celebrated writers? No? Very well, then, if you *had*, you would have known that in perpetrating a murder the more public the place the safer the murderer. Were I at this moment to ventilate the respected windpipe of our friend Frecklenose before your very eyes, I should, without the slightest doubt (always provided I had counsel possessing forensic ability and eloquence equal to my own) be pronounced 'not guilty' by an intelligent jury, and should most probably be complimented for having done an action highly beneficial to the interests of the colony. My keen insight into human nature shows me that the murderer is gifted with mental power and cunning equal only to my own. After mature thought I have no doubt that the murderer, being a highly intellectual and far-seeing man, went through East Melbourne to Fitzroy Gardens, or else walked in an entirely opposite direction. No one was about at that time, and he did it without detection." Caldron, at the height of enthusiasm, was ready to accept the responsibility and the glory of the admirable murder. "I was sly, devilish sly, don't yer know," he continued. "Did I throttle the corpse with my own superfine hose? Not I. Did I leave my card with the wheelbarrow man in the event of inquiries being instituted? Not I. Did I——?"

"In the name of the law I arrest you," said Tol-de-Rolleston, sternly, placing his hand on Caldron's shoulder.

"Oh, it's all right, old fellow," said Caldron, confusedly. "I didn't do the thing, but, really now, don't you think I ought to defend the murderer. I have already such a profound knowledge of his motives, such a sweet sympathy with his highly-wrought mind, that I certainly think, nay, I am sure there is no lawyer in Australia more capable of bringing about a favourable verdict."

"Certainly," said Tol-de-Rolleston. "Certainly, certainly," echoed the convives. Then somebody struck up "For he's a jolly good fellow," and the strain was "taken up" by the detective, and finally sung in chorus by the assembled company with what dulcet tones and oral accuracy nature had endowed them.

CHAPTER VIII.

FITZDOODLE TAKES A RUN.

THE note of harmony having been struck, the company settled down seriously to the business of mirthful song. Lenora Topweight was the first to "oblige the company." This young lady's papa happened to be no less a person than the flourishing purveyor of tripe, by appointment, to the Legislative Council, a fact which induced Mr. Tol-de-Rolleston to pay Miss Topweight the most unctuous compliments and assiduous attentions that his volatile nature would allow. She had a very pretty talent for piccolo *soli*, and gave "The Lost Chord" with variations. An *obbligato* banjo accompaniment by Mr. Tol-de-Rolleston would have considerably enhanced the beauty of the melody, had the accompanist possessed any knowledge of the instrument; but a too-evident desire to outstrip the fair flautist in velocity of execution somewhat marred the suave harmonious cadences originally devised by Sir Arthur Sullivan, and finally led to the disastrous collapse of the banjo strings, by which the imperishable "Lost Chord" was nearly lost for ever.

"It's nothing but practice," said Miss Lenora Topweight, modestly blushing and unscrewing her lips into a wide-mouthed smile.

"*Cette bouche admirablement grande!*" sighed Leo, quoting François Coppée, and seizing the instrument, he imprinted a passionate kiss upon its blow-hole. Then he looked up to Lenora's face and sighed anew.

During this performance Peggy and O'Brier were sitting hand-in-hand. He was ashy pale, and his usually smileless face was now as long as any Cremona. The prelude—*adagio appassionata*—to a cornet solo by Cerulia Topweight, a sister of the last performer, induced Fitzdoodle to seek the coolness of the verandah.

(The Topweight family had a passion for wind instruments; even "papa" Topweight was a deft performer upon the bagpipes, and had made with his own hands, out of a remnant of tripe, subjected to a drying and tanning process, a miniature instrument of that class, which emitted no uncertain sound.)

"I'm mush besher now, dearsh Peggy," said Fitzdoodle, who had been strangely affected by the performance of "The Lost Chord." Peggy deposited him in a wicker chair, lit a cigarette, and, after a few "whiffs," puckering up her pretty mouth into a dainty smile, she handed it to her lover.

"Hallo, who's that tapping at the garden gate?" she suddenly exclaimed.

"D— his impudence!" cried O'Brier with a start; "some fellow after the clothes lines and props. Flit, flit, my sweet; leave him to me; I'll soon settle him."

So Peggy "flitted," like a shadow, through the French window. Then Fitzdoodle set to work. Gathering a few moist lumps of clay from the adjacent flower pots, he rolled them into pellets—grape-shot, small bore, cartridge, and six-pounders ("stars of the first magnitude," he called them). "Bother Black; wish I'd never seen him," he muttered uneasily. Then taking a pellet of minor importance, he threw it in the direction of the watcher, who ducked, turned a somersault, and exhibited to Fitzdoodle's astonished eyes the figure of a man clad in the motley garb of a circus clown.

The intelligent reader will easily divine that it was no other than Mr. Clawby, who, with the genius of his craft, had adopted this cunning disguise.

Had O'Brier conceived what was the mission of the parti-coloured watcher, perhaps he would have paused ere he hurled his deadly projectiles from his coign of vantage. As it was, he hurled pellet after pellet, always with the same strange result—a laugh, a duck, and then a somersault—until, at last, a six-pounder, thrown at random and consequently with more precision, found a home in the painted eye of the intruder, who, with a blessing upon the marksman, fell headlong to the ground.

"How's that for eye?" muttered the soothed, but pitiless victor, as he sauntered back through the French window,

which rattled with the last blast of Cerulia's cornet—a powerful effort, which had the beneficent effect of "speeding the parting guest."

Mr. Clawby, always equal to any call upon his powers of dissimulation, had not adopted his present disguise without a prudent consultation with his toothbrush, and, sooth to say, had been highly elated with the notion that in choosing the motley, he surpassed in ingenuity and audacity the highest flights of genius ever indulged in by the great Lecoq. After two days' arduous exercise, he acquired the facile saltatory grace of the accomplished clown, and dared on the evening in question to saunter from his humble lodging, followed by all the small fry of the neighbourhood. He improvised an entertainment in Fitzroy Gardens, which brought a few tributary "coppers," in the shape of coin, and one in the shape of a policeman. So disguising his disguise in the dressing-gown he carried for that purpose, he "moved on" in the direction of the "Kilted Opossum."

The piccolo, banjo, and cornet had certainly charmed the ear of the watchful Clawby; but still he was impatient. The object "wanted" had not yet made any sign until the attack from the verandah had revealed Fitzdoodle's intuitive feeling of animosity. But at last Cerulia's vigorous lungs were blowing the remains of "Tannhauser" through the cornet's labyrinthian tubes and valves, and the departing guests flocked from the "Kilted Opossum" into the stilly summer night. Clawby having partially recovered from the discomfiture caused by the six-pounder, quietly awaited his assailant. The latter soon made his appearance. Frecklenose was hanging upon the arm of his future son-in-law, and indulged in innocent *facetiæ* on things in general :—"Lovely night for wheel-barrow ri', ole (hic) f'ler—look atche moon, prapsh itsh shun—Australian 'rangement of planetsh remarkably strangsh."

"That'll do, old fossil," said Fitzdoodle, roughly; "you toddle up to bed, and leave the sun, moon and stars to take care of themselves. Good night, Peggy; look after the aged and wintry one, or he'll be tumbling into the well—in search of truth."

Then he kissed his fair inamorata, who glanced up at his face with the passionate light of love in her emerald

eyes, like the faint flush of early dawn upon the first efforts of a gooseberry bush.

"Ahdew, ahdew, belovèd!" she murmured to his third waistcoat button; then she left him in order to disentangle her "papa" from the cucumber frame, into which he had plunged with the avowed purpose of taking a matutinal bath in the Yarra.

Fitzdoodle sauntered jauntily along the esplanade until he came to the most convenient spot for exhibiting his manly features to the vigilant Clawby. Doffing his hat, he saluted the world in general, and lit a cigarette.

"You're a remarkably good-looking young fellow," observed the detective, closely scrutinising O'Brier's features. "I can scarcely believe you did it, but as a detective of twenty years' standing, I am bound——"

Mr. Clawby was "left sitting," as the parliamentary reporters say; for Fitzdoodle felt strangely annoyed, and mildly observing that, "after standing so many years, a rest would be beneficial," he had induced Mr. Clawby, by means of a well-directed "ivory rattler" to assume a recumbent attitude.

O'Brier, lighting a fresh cigarette, continued his walk.

It was night. There was not a breath of wind, for the breezes (tired of chasing one another round Frecklenose's flower-pots) had long since died away—an atmospheric phenomenon peculiar to the Victorian climate. O'Brier, being in a perturbed state of mind, observed with close attention the picturesque cacophony of tints displayed in the panorama that lay before him—the *white* waves breaking on the *yellow* sands, the *black* pier jutting out into the *silver* sea—illuminated for the occasion by the Williamstown lights; the Titanic masses of clouds "heaped one on top of the other;" then a brilliant break in a *white* woof, a bit of Oxford *blue* sky, bespangled with glittering stars, amongst which the serene moon "sailed," for the ostensible purpose of "shedding down" her *cold* light upon a *parti-coloured* clown and a moon-struck Irishman in a "*blue* funk." A weird, *bizarre*, fantastical, fairy-like scene, such as a Doré would have loved, and Fitzdoodle *a toujours adoré*. He lighted a fresh cigarette, and continued to gaze upon the heavens, while

the motley detective turned fantastic somersaults to keep himself warm.

As an experienced detective, it was plainly evident that he must attract as much attention as possible. So he followed the soliloquising O'Brier up the pier and down the pier, treading every now and then upon that gentleman's heels to remind him that he was still observed. Fitzdoodle began to show signs of displeasure, and lighted a fresh cigarette. The "dreamy", waters, rising and falling in a "glittering" rhythm, invited his confidences.

"If she knew——if she only knew——Oh! if she ——Do, in the d—l's name, keep your nose out of my face, my good man." Clawby closed his note-book with a sympathising sigh, simply recording in hastily improvised Pitman that Fitzdoodle's face was ghastly pale and "his brows wrinkled angerly"—a facial distortion of colonial origin. Fitzdoodle, lighting a fresh cigarette, bethought himself that if he lingered on the pier he might miss the last train to East Melbourne. So striding hastily away towards the station, he threw himself into a smoking carriage and lit a fresh cigarette. The pertinacious follower was politely but firmly refused admittance to the same compartment, altho' Mr. Clawby pleaded, in supplicating tones, that the great Lecoq would never have tolerated such an indignity.

"Lecoq be d——d, and you too!" said O'Brier, forcing the fag end of the cigarette into Mr. Clawby's injured optic, as the train moved out of the station. The sham clown disappeared with an unearthly howl, and Fitzdoodle, congratulating himself upon having at last rid himself of the intruder, lit a fresh cigarette, and apostrophised the seats and cushions of the railway carriage in the following manner:—"Miss Braddon's a fool compared to it. Never devised anything like it in her literary existence. The most important point in Australian murders is their resemblance or dissimilarity to those that have been plotted and executed in the fertile brain of the novelist. Miss Braddon? Gaboreau? Dickens? Not in it, any of them! Murdered in a wheel-barrow——good old wheelbarrow! But, aha! I must dissemble. Can anyone know? Who could have seen me with Black that night? No one, no one!" But still, Fitzdoodle was not comfortable.

He rose from his seat, executed a highly-finished breakdown, lay supine upon the cushions, threw his legs into the air, sought relief by rolling under the seats, lighted fresh cigarettes, but all to no purpose.

"Pshaw!" he ejaculated at last, "I am safe; 'tective fellah probably writhing upon hospital bed at the present mom——"

"Here we are again!" shouted Mr. Clawby, jumping through the window, and turning a double somersault. "Here we are again—fresh as paint!"

O'Brier's brow re-wrinkled "angerly," but he uttered never a word. Arrived at his station, he leapt from the railway carriage, and fled—fled past the ticket-collector, over the barrier, up the stairs, onward; looked not to right of him, turned not to left of him, all the world wondered—wondered to see the breathless Fitzdoodle flying from the motley mountebank in the rear; wondered to see the fugitive threading the mazes of our Melbourne streets with an eagerness denoting that "his primary object was speed;" wondered to see him stop dead before the Burke and Wills monument with a dazed and dreadful stare; wondered to see the ludicrous figure of a circus clown drop down upon the hapless Fitzdoodle from darkness and space, and execute a thoughtful *pas seul* before the bewildered and perspiring runaway. Mr. Clawby had taken a "short cut," and with the gifted foresight of an experienced detective had posted himself upon the monument, certain, as a student of Gaberow should be, that the criminal would be attracted by a horrible but irresistible fascination to the place associated with his crime.

"Well, chappie," chirped the detective, "come to look at the old spot? Too late for a toothful, old fellah, ain't it? Ah! you're off again, are you?"

For Fitzdoodle had sprung to his feet, and was already going at a useful pace. He hailed a hansom. "Spare no expense," he panted to the Jehu perched behind, and away they went. Mr. Clawby hailed another cab. "Spare no expense," he shouted, poking his head through the trapdoor in the roof of the vehicle, by which ghastly jack-in-the-box proceeding he frightened poor cabby into space. Regaining his seat, the cabman urged on his trusty steed

Away! away! rattling through the tranquil city went the two cabs, awaking from their slumbers the peaceful dwellers in our great Victorian capital. Away! away! all through that portion of the Melbourne Post Office Directory inscribed "Streets." Away! away! through the livelong night, until the dawn

"Stood tiptoe on the misty turnip tops."

"What sport," chuckled the indefatigable experienced one, rubbing his hands; "what sport, bringing down a prime cove like this!"

"Look 'ere, boss," shrieked the cabman, through the aperture in the roof, "Betsy's cast three shoes, and 'er off 'ind leg's been stuck thro' the splash-board this last 'alf hour. If you 'aint got spavins, git out an' dror the bloomin' cart yourself."

"On, on, caitiff," yelled Mr. Clawby, thrusting a liberal I.O.U. through the trap-door. But a thunderous crash echoed through the "blue silence." Fitzdoodle's cab had collapsed! Jehu was stretched on the wheel, while the hind quarters of his "red roan steed" emerged from the roof in defiance of all known regulations as to vehicular traffic. And Fitzdoodle? He was already far ahead—examining the chaste statuary in the Treasury Gardens—Venus Vitrix holding the apple in her hand (Mr. Clawby took this to be a costly advertisement of Pears's soap); Diana, with her wistful-looking hound at her feet (whom the experienced detective imagined to be a statue commemorating the establishment of the cats' and dogs' meat industry in our colony); and Bacchus and Ariadne (whom Mr. Clawby thought were a couple of bold young things, evidently no better than they ought to be). It is strange how great minds, though intent on noble ends, can be diverted by such a trivial spectacle as that of a young couple carved in stone, and whose linen draper's bills must have been very modest indeed. So thought Mr. Clawby as he scampered after the fugitive. Nothing daunted, he followed "his man" over five-barred gates, through brier and bramble, leaving bit by bit his particoloured raiment behind him, so that he bid fair to rival,

in scarcity of clothing, the statues he had despised. He plodded on, till at last Fitzdoodle, glancing furtively around, slid up Powlett Street, and stopped breathless at his own door. The watchful Clawby fell upon his knees, with an invocation to the shade of the immortal Lecoq ; then he rose and walked silently home, embraced his beloved toothbrush, and wept for joy.

CHAPTER IX.

CRICKS AND CRACKLES.

"MR. FITZDOODLE O'BRIER, are you or are you not going to lend me that half-dollar?" said Oliver Black, seated comfortably in Fitz's favourite arm-chair. The person to whom this immoderate demand was addressed turned in his bed, placed his nose firmly against the wall, and replied only by a groan. "What!" continued the unwelcome visitor, after a pause of expectancy, "what! do you mean to say that after having had the questionable taste to polish me off in a common wheel-barrow to suit your own convenience, without allowing me so much as twenty-four hours' notice to square my worldly accounts, say "Good-bye" to Peggy, and——"

"How dare you," began O'Brier, starting up. But a glance at his visitor was sufficient. Fitzdoodle hastily sheltered himself under the bed-clothes.

"Observe, my friend," Black resumed, rising and approaching the bed, "that I expect from you some small modicum of courtesy after the great inconvenience you have put me to." And deftly removing the sheets and blankets, Mr. Black got into bed with his unwilling host, leaving his legs standing in the middle of the room. "Yes, I can quite conceive," he went on, with surprising calmness—"I can quite conceive that a bed-fellow consisting of a part of a corpse of your own fabrication must be in a certain measure a most unwelcome one. Now, if it were a cold and wintry night instead of a kind of vapour bath *à la moustique* (we commonly talk French, in—er—the *place* I come from), you might have been agreeably surprised at my warmth of body. Feel!"

Fitzdoodle uttered an unearthly yell, as Black gently tweaked his nose, and the discarded legs executed a *danse macabre*.

"Is it always as warm as that *down there?*" asked Fitzdoodle, with evident alarm, while he tenderly caressed his nose.

"Wal, friend," replied Mr. Black, "I wouldn't like to mislead you, but I should say I'm just an icicle compared with what *you'll* be."

(Here Mr. Black's legs, after setting to partners, enjoyed a hearty galop round the room.)

"You may have that half-dollar, Oliver," said Fitzdoodle, meekly, "only—only put in a word for me *down there* with regard to—with regard to—er—Peggy; she's rather delicate, Oliver, and the hot weather doesn't usually agree with her."

"Don't be anxious on that score; I shall make her my special care." Prodding Fitzdoodle jocularly in the ribs, Mr. Black rose, resumed his legs, and with a grim smile upon his ghastly face, as he watched the contortions of his host, prepared to take his leave.

"Ta-ta, old chappie," said Black, airily; "I shall drop in again to-morrow night. Ta-ta."

Moved with sudden rage, Fitzdoodle wrinkled his brow *very* angrily, and just as the door was opening with a ghostly creak, he seized a slipper and flung it with a mighty effort at the retreating shape. A shriek, a clatter of china, and Fitzdoodle awoke.

"Oh, Mr. O'Brier!—got 'em again?" cried a familiar voice. Fitzdoodle rubbed his eyes.

"Good heavens, what's up, Mrs. Crackles?"

He sank back with a groan. There lay the slipper to remind him of his horrid vision. There stood his weeping landlady, at whose unoffending head the missile had been hurled; and there on the floor lay the ruins of his matutinal meal.

"Oh, Mrs. Crackles, Mrs. Crackles, what a precious existence I'm going to lead if this sort of thing is going to happen frequently! Did you lock the front door last night, Mrs. C.?"

"Why, lord love you, sir," said the astonished lady, "you didn't never get 'ome not till the crack o' dawn—wich I s'posed you was out high-falutin' with that there painted clown as I saw a follerin' yer up the street, like the ghost of my great-grandfather's uncle's father on my

mother's side, as follered him continual, night an' day, a-askin' of 'im to give 'im back the shirt 'e lent 'im when 'e went to the christenin' of my aunt's fos.er-brother's grandmother's half-sister's grand-nephew—which makes 'im my cousin severial times removed, the last time with hinfluenza, wich he took thro' sleepin' on a damp bed, wich I mean the front garden bed, containing early spring onions, owin' to drink, wich my father's cousin's great-aunt cut up in small pieces in a dish of Hirish stoo." Crick! Crick!

Fitzdoodle's landlady had "run down," for which the gentle reader of this remarkable romance may thank his lucky stars.

Mrs. Crackles was one of the dry and chippy specimens of human mechanism, such as exist only in our free and rising colony. She was even much drier than Mr. Rider Haggard's *She* must have been a few moments after the Pillar of Life had refused to renew her lease. Her flesh and skin, in complexion and texture, vied with the epicarp and sarcocarp of an aged grey pea. Considered as a comestible, the "anthropophagi" would have spurned her, though as fuel for their characteristic *cuisine* they would have hailed her with delight. In the days of her more sappy youth she had undergone the delicate operation of tracheotomy, which, though mainly successful in preserving her from the pangs of the Destroyer (good old pangs!), left something to be desired, inasmuch as the silver tube insinuated into the windpipe of this dry female by Dr. Shinbone (the well-known surgeon dentist), contained a fine disused molar. It has been conjectured that this trophy of dental skill had been surreptitiously inserted by the "buttons" of our eminent practitioner, previous to the introduction of the tube; but, conjecture what one may, it remains a fact that the tooth in question played the same *rôle* in Mrs. Crackles's windpipe as a pea in a whistle. Upon the slightest approach to loud elocution, or excessive emotion, up flew the tooth with a crick! crick! and the reader is released from an engrossing recital of the multitudinous experiences and strange ramifications of the Crackles family.

Fitzdoodle, thankful for that unnatural full stop, requested Mrs. Crackles to withdraw. Then unfolding

the morning's *Daily Muddler*, he turned to the latest report concerning the wheel-barrow mystery.

"A clue! they've got a clue!" he cried, in horror, his brow re-wrinkling as before. "I must be up and away—(my trowsers, where are they?) They shall never, never know what I know. Oh, Peggy! Peggy! (I'll put on a clean shirt—hang the expense!)—I know how you would pity me, your own Fitzdoodle," he cried, the passionate tears starting from his eyes. "(Hang that old Crackles; I wish she'd sew my button on.) Oh, if it should ever come off, I am a ruined man! (My necktie!—feels like putting my head in a noose—the latest *noose*—good joke, eh? to spring on 'em at the 'Kilted 'Possum.') No! that clown fellow, though he *was* inquisitive, can never have tracked me to my diggings. O Peggy! Peggy!—Bah! I am a fool. (My hat, my gloves!) They can nevah, nevah suspect Fitzdoodle O'Brier!"

Wiping away his transient tears, he pulled the bell.

"Mrs. Crackles," he said, as soon as that dry person appeared, "I am going to the usual place"—with a naughty wink—"S' Kilda, *you* know—er—if—er shouldn't be home, don't 'spect me, don't yer know."

"Yes," said Mrs. Crackles, dryly.

"By-th'-bye, old Frecklenose 'n' Peggy coming heah to tea, don't yer know. Had quite forgotten. Funny pr'ceeding, bring Frecklenose 'n' Peggy all way from S' Kildah for sake of cup tea, don't yer know; but suits exigencies of the nov'list, d' you see?"

"Wich I see quite plain, as my uncle's sponsor wrote a novil as 'e desecrated to 'is mother-in-law, wich was known by the name of 'The Old Ruin; or, Blarsted Affectations.'"

"Which you mean 'Blighted Affections,' Mrs. Crackles," interposed O'Brier.

"Wich I don't mean nothink of the kind."

"Well, never mind what you mean, crick up, old parchment, crick up!"

Crick! Crick! went the anhydrous lady, as if in obedience to the command. She shook her sapless fist in Fitzdoodle's face, and, as he turned and fled, cricked again in very scorn.

A stranger approached the house. He was of a portly

and genial aspect—altogether a very comfortable-looking species of homicide—*genus* family doctor.' Dusting the bell handle with his glove, he rang the bell. Mrs. Crackles received the stranger, with an inhospitable crick!

"I'm pleased, madam, to see you looking so well this morning. I am Mr. Clawby, the cleverest detective in Melbourne, madam, and I am disguised as a family doctor, in order to conceal my designs. Be good enough to let me see your tongue—just for form's sake, you know. Hum—m'yes—rather furred. A camomile pill, Mrs. Crackles, will set you right, I think. Your—er—liver needs a mild corrective."

"Wich it's like your outrageous himpudence to hinterfere with my hinternal arrangements."

Dr. Clawby was thinking that a dose of sulphuric acid would be hardly sufficient to cause any organic disturbance within the desiccated lady before him, when his reflections were cut short by a loud crick!

"Ah! m'yes, thought so," said he, gravely; "slight derangement of the syntax owing to parenthetical hypothesis. Rub the *sine quâ non* with linseed tea, and put your feet *in medias res*, *bis in die*, madam, *bis in die*."

"Wich I'd rub anythink, doctor, only I don't know where all them long words is situated." Mrs. Crackles glanced apologetically down her brittle form, and cricked again.

"*N'importe*, my dear madam, can you give me any precise information as to the state of Mr. O'Erier's liver? If you will allow me to step into his room we could talk more privately upon the matter."

Mrs. Crackles cricked approval, and led the way to her lodger's *sanctum sanctorum*.

"Now, my dear Mrs. Crackles, is Mr. Fitzdoodle regular in his habits? Do you allow him the inestimable privilege of a latch-key?"

"Well, doctor, 'e's that regular in 'is 'abits as I ginerally find 'is slippers or 'is boots in bed a-mornin's three times a-week, wich reminds me of my grandfather—" Crick!

"M'yes, and his morals?" said Dr. Clawby, with a playful smile, and a dig at Mrs. Crackle's ribs.

She replied only by a brittle wink, whereat the doctor

laughed, and Mrs. Crackles laughed, till the doctor went into convulsions, and Mrs. Crackles cricked hysterically.

"I see, Mrs. C.," said the doctor, "you have a profound knowledge of human nature that Balzac or Gaboroo might have envied. Your kitchen clock is slow, is it not?"

"Wich it may be," said Mrs. Crackles, suspiciously; "how did *you* know?"

"You admit it then," said Mr. Clawby. "O triumph of detective skill! Madam, my knowledge of the fact was intuitive, and in strict compliance with the exigencies of the remarkable romance in which you play a *rôle*. Last Thursday, I presume, Mr. Fitzdoodle didn't come home till Friday?" continued Dr. Clawby, epigramatically.

"Just so, doctor. I was in the kitchen lookin' for the loocifers, wich I allus keep aside my bed in case of a houtbreak of fire or thieves. I found 'em at last, and struck one, and the clock struck two, just as Mr. O'Brier comes in. I harsked 'im kinder gently to put that there clock right, and didn't he just get on the table an' wind that long 'and round an' round like a organ-grinder, and a-whistlin'. 'Something went wrong with the works,' just like my sister's third, when——" Crick!

"The very man!" cried Dr. Clawby, agitating the "darbies" in his pocket medicine-chest.

At that moment, according to the exigencies aforesaid, there was a knock at the door, and Mrs. Crackles cricked away to answer it, leaving Mr. Clawby in possession of the room.

The room was exquisitely furnished. Two-and-sixpenny chromos, *avant l'epreuve*, (bearing the autograph of the President of the Art Society of N. S. W.) everywhere abounded. The bed was in excellent taste (Mr. Clawby tried the spring mattress), and there was a writing-table under the window, which, according to a custom prevailing in our free and rising colony, was covered with papers. There was no time to waste, as Mrs. Crackles might return at any moment, so Mr. Clawby spent half-an-hour apostrophising the portrait of Peggy Frecklenose, which stood in its plush frame on the mantel-shelf. Underneath the picture Mr. Clawby found the following inscription in Fitzdoodle's handwriting:—

"Not for thee, obnoxious Black,
Shine these softly slanting eyes!
Never to thy three-pair back
Wilt thou wile my peerless prize!"

Mr. Clawby, with a sigh, turned away from the portrait of "Peggy in a Plush Frame." His attention was attracted by a fawn-coloured dressing-gown and a soft hat hanging behind the door.

"The very man," cried the doctor.

There were several things in the pockets of the dressing-gown, but the hat contained nothing worthy of mention. O triumph! there, in the pocket of the gown, was the missing right-hand glove! Of course Fitzdoodle had worn that dressing-gown since the night of the murder, but nothing—oh, nothing—would ever have induced him to destroy that interesting clue! The exigencies of the novelist would never, never permit it.

"It must have been with the keenest sensation of pain that Mr. Fitzdoodle parted with the chloroform bottle," said Mr. Clawby, when Mrs. Crackles returned.

"Wich I don't know what you mean, doctor, owin' to the exigencies——" Crick!

"If our friend should return to-day," said Mr. Clawby, blandly, "be good enough to tell him I should recommend him, *as* a friend, to try a cold compress of hemp—an excellent thing for a stiff neck; for his wrists, a little friction of steel will do him good."

"Wich I won't fail to tell him," said Mrs. Crackles, bowing the doctor out, "as I suffers from my throat myself, tho' all the 'angin' in the world wouldn't make no compression on me, owin' to the toobe wich is hinside like my brother's wife's first as swallared a tin whistle wich my uncle's godfather what was a great mugician left as a legacy to my late husband's second sister's——" Crick!

Ere Mrs. Crackles cricked again, a warrant for the arrest of Fitzdoodle O'Brier on a charge of murder was placed in the hands of the experienced detective of twenty years' standing.

CHAPTER X.

THE CUSHION OF TRIBULATION.

Tout-Melbourne was "doing the Block" in Collins Street, just as *Tout-Paris* and *Tout-Londres* "do" the Block in Hyde Park and the Bois de Boulogne, only with this difference: the Victorian dog-days were ever so much more canicular than those known to *Tout-Paris* or *Tout-Londres*, so that *Tout-Melbourne*, sweltering beneath the sun, felt like being "Blocked and Ironed while waiting." *Tout-Melbourne*, then, was bowing and nodding and chatting in the modern happy way, just as "sweet Catullus" did in the ancient Appian Way, when he and Horace backed Virgil against Bathyllus to fight three rounds under the rules of Queenberrius, to the infinite delight of certain Lesbian ladies belonging to the *demi-monde* of *Tout-Rome*.

It hath been noticed that just as the *Cimex lectularius*, at the first smile of the summer sun, steps forth from his winter home into the full front of day, so, under the same seductive influences, do the Victorian ladies put on bright raiment, and face the fascinating dangers of the block, making the street like unto a "restless rainbow." From a poetical and peptic point of view it was a lovely, animated scene.

Peggy and Fitzdoodle, of course, were being blocked and ironed amongst the rest. Miss Frecklenose was engaged in the delightful occupation of shopping, and Fitzdoodle was her attendant knight and parcel-bearer. As he stood outside the busy establishment of Messrs. Melton Mowbray & Co., patiently waiting his inamorata, he wore the meek apologetic air of the beast of burden. The parcels he carried were numerous and interesting. Within those wrappers of many colours an unscrupulous investigator might have found candles, sugar, soap,

knitting-wools, cheese, hair-pins, pomatum, and early green peas—not to speak of a peculiarly-constructed piece of mechanism like unto an eel-trap, which Fitzdoodle divined was a so-called "dress improver." "And more to come," mused the woe-begone young man, growing impatient. At that moment Peggy emerged from Melton Mowbray's emporium, bearing a package of appalling size.

"What in the name of wonder have you got there?" cried O'Brier.

"Don't ask questions, dearest Fitz, but carry it," answered Peggy, with a winning smile.

"But what is it?" said the already overladen lover.

"It is a cushion, love," said Peggy, gravely. "Knowing, by some strange intuitive feeling, that fate, and the exigencies of the romance in which we play so terrible a part, will require of me to bend my knees in supplication, in prayer, in grief, in gratitude, at least three or four times in every chapter, I have made this useful purchase. Are you satisfied, my darling?"

"Quite, my own. Now let's take a 'bus to S'Kilda."

"Oh, but we've got to call for pa at the Dressing-Gown Club."

"Very well, I'm glad of it; he can carry the green peas and the—er—mouse-trap."

Peggy glanced up at him with a blush.

Frank Frecklenose was addressing a group of club men on the subject of the wheel-barrow mystery. He had gained notoriety from the fact that he had been frequently seen with the murdered man, himself a member of the Dressing-Gown Club.

"Damn that wheel-barrow business," shouted Fitzdoodle, his impetuous Irish nature getting the better of his usually gentle manners. Frecklenose glanced at the speaker in astonishment. 'Twas not usual, he hazarded, for gentlemen of the Dressing-Gown Club to address their future fathers-in-law in a manner involving the use of the imperative mood of the verb "to damn," whether active or reflective.

"That'll do, ancient. Peggy's waiting below. You're coming with us to my diggings to tea. Take hold of these parcels, old 'un—green peas and candles, and mind the grease."

Isn't it rather unusual, my dear Fitzdoodle, to take tea at one o'clock?"

"It may be, antique boss, but the exigencies——"

"O damn the exigencies!"

"It is not usual, sir," retorted O'Brier hastily, "for antiquated persons belonging to the Dressing-Gown Club to address their prospective sons-in-law in a manner necessitating the employment of words calculated to compel the hair of an owl's egg to rise in holy horror."

They had now joined Peggy. Fricklenose and Fitzdoodle went "Tommy Dod" for a hansom, and the trio drove towards East Melbourne.

Mr. Frecklenose engrossed the attention of the young people by a learned disquisition on Scriptural drama, in which he confessed to the opinion that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were natives of Melbourne, and the "fiery furnace" was an allegorical symbol for the Victorian dog-days.

They arrived at their destination just as Mr. Frecklenose was discussing the matter from Abednego's point of view.

The lovers left the controversialist in the middle of a highly-flavoured dispute with the cabman, and went in-doors.

Mrs. Crackles cricked right merrily. There was no tea ready, the guests having arrived several hours before the appointed time; but the willing Peggy supplied the deficiencies of Mr. Crackles's larder from her own store.

"Wich I should have made a cake," apologised Mrs. Crackles, "only that useless brat of a girl went an' used all the carraway seeds for Keating's powder."

Thin bread and butter, then, was the staple commodity, and Peggy did full justice to the meal. As her hands wandered among the cups and saucers—a quaint collection of crockery, whose principal beauty consisted in its bizarre dissimilitude of patterns—Fitzdoodle gazed upon her with tearful affection. "If she knew all," he said to himself, "would she be drinking my two-and-eightpenny Moning Congou with such sweet complacency?" Then a briny tear dropped upon the water-cress. Frank Frecklenose, too, as he looked fondly at his daughter's

deftly-moving hands, thought of his late wife, and added a salt tear to his cheering cup.

"Well, you're just a couple of funerals," said Peggy, "as if there wasn't enough hot water in your tea already, pa!" And she helped herself again to thin bread and butter.

"I'm afraid," she continued, during the process of mastication, "I'm afraid you are not students of the Victorian edition of Shakespeare's 'Midsummer Night's Dream.'"

"O yes, I am," said Fitzdoodle, waylaying a tear with his cambric; "Titania stung to death by mosquitoes and widowed Oberon on staff of *Sydney Bulletin.* That's it, ain't it?"

"Yes," said Mr. Frecklenose, "and Bottom arrested for sheep-stealing, and Puck, with his wings clipped, reduced to writing shilling dreadfuls *à la Gabaroo.* I prefer De Quincey's 'Murder as a Fine Art.'"

Fitzdoodle shivered, and dashed his costly China teacup at an adjacent chromo. "*Dulce est desipere in loco,*" said he, in explanation of this proceeding.

In such gentle and edifying converse the trio chased the flying hours, until Peggy, having transferred the whole of the thin bread and butter from the plate into herself, suggested an adjournment. Fitzdoodle proposed to dine at the "Kilted Opossum," and give them a reading from Gaborault. At that moment Mrs. Crackles's high-pitched organ was heard in portentous crepitations and cricks, and the door was thrown violently open, admitting Mr. Clawby's generous form, followed by another gentleman of persuasive mien. Mr. Clawby, after a lengthened debate with his toothbrush, had at first decided to dispense with disguise as superfluous, but the innate detective genius had prevailed, and he had disguised himself in liquor for the occasion.

"Fitzdoodly Brier, I 'rest Fitzdool' Brier in Queensh name!" he said, advancing unsteadily towards Frank Frecklenose.

Peggy shrieked aloud.

"For what?" said O'Brier, with a stern voice, as he crept proudly under the bed.

"Murder it ish," said Mr. Clawby, jocosely; "Oliver

Black—*you* know, no kid!" he added, slipping the darbies on Mrs. Crackles's wrists, outstretched in anguish.

"Wich I never sloo nothink in my life save a litter o' pups wich my sister——" Crick!

Peggy hastily untied the parcel containing her newly-purchased cushion, and throwing herself at the foot of the bedstead, "O my darling," she cried, "I love you more now than ever! Come out, my Fitz! It is not true! It is not true!"

"My Peggy," cried the invisible O'Brier tenderly, and his voice sounded strange and stuffy.

"Away! Peggy," cried Mr. Frecklenose, "there is nothing between you and that man now."

"Yes there is; there's this confounded bedstead. Come out, my dearest!"

Mr. Clawby had by this time released Mrs. Crackles, and handcuffed and then liberated his assistant. Finding Fitzdoodle inclined to remain where he was, the party assembled, by their united efforts, launched the bedstead on an experimental journey round the room, but our hero, by means of well-judged quadrumanous movements, kept pace with the strategic peregrinations of the enemy. Mr. Clawby, losing patience as well as equilibrium, at length proposed to "shmoke out th' enemy," and the company having acquiesced, this hostile operation commenced. Mr. Frecklenose, armed with a firebrand of brown paper, attacked the enemy in the rear, while the experienced detective and his assistant poured in upon the flanks of the besieged a deadly volume of tobacco smoke from an improved battery of "churchwardens." These warlike tactics, however, were not immediately successful, and had not Mr. Frecklenose accidentally fired the stronghold, the enemy would have given the besiegers a lot of trouble.

Mrs. Crackles, cricking with terror at the threatened destruction of her excellent bedding, seized the water-jug and dashed its contents upon the devastating flames, just as Fitzdoodle, also terrified by the conflagration, had decided upon a determined sortie. As Mrs. Crackles threw cold water upon the proceeding, Fitzdoodle yielded to the besiegers—though not ingloriously.

"Peggy," he cried, "I am now a prisoner, perhaps a

doomed man. But because I am innocent of the crime of which I am accused, I yield! Peace! microcephalous imbecile," he added, with a noble gesture, turning to Clawby, "I surrendah!"

The experienced detective dropped a tear of compassionate grief as he slipped the bracelets on Fitzdoodle's wrists.

Peggy bade her lover an affecting "Ahdew!" and the party moved away to the slow music of Mrs. Crackle's most emotional cricks; then, arranging her cushion of tribulation at her father's feet, Peggy dropped prone upon his most troublesome corn, and fainted away.

CHAPTER XI.

"HE BOILED IT!"

HOWEVER horrible and atrocious the wheel-barrow murder might be, it had the beneficial effect of establishing the supremacy of the Melbourne evening newspapers over all other journals of the kind. Not even the London *Star* or the *Pall Mall Gazette* could have invented a more blood-curdling contents bill than that produced by the *Melbourne Moonshine*. Twenty-four editions were issued ere Fitzdoodle had reached the prison door. Flimsies from our imaginative Victorian reporters poured into news offices in such profusion that three sub-editors, at their wits' end, were conveyed to the nearest lunatic asylum.

The following is the contents bill referred to, displayed in "sensational type"—a special fount reserved for murder and divorce cases:—

THE APPALLING WHEEL-BARROW CRIME.

The Dastardly Murderer run to Earth.

The Assassin's Retreat.

Desperate Resistance.

The Passionate Pleadings of his Betrothed.

Bravery and Magnanimity of the Great Clawby.

Proposed offer of a Baronetcy.

17th Special Edition.

One Shilling.

Edition de Luxe, Two Shillings and Sixpence.

The next day the "Kilted Opossum" was besieged by customers thirsting for information, beer, and spirits.

Peggy was the cynosure of all eyes. In a conversation she had with her father, it was resolved to increase the price of spirits in the bar parlour, and to subject the malt liquors to a more whole-hearted baptism than that usually deemed expedient by the Excise authorities. But in the midst of these momentous arrangements Peggy did not forsake her lover. Her impassioned eloquence, seconded by a judicious liberality of measure, secured many a convert to her belief in Fitzdoodle's innocence.

But Mr. Frecklenose seemed less favourably inclined towards the accused. "If," he said to the assembled customers, with ponderous impressiveness—"if he was not with Black that night he must have been elsewhere." Then, after the chorus of assent had subsided, he added, "That means that he must set up an *alibi*."

"O, pa, I'm sure he would set up as anything, even in the cattle-wash line, if only for my sake," urged poor Peggy.

Mr. Frecklenose assumed his "wintry smile" at this reference to the foundation of his fortune. "Fitz was here on the night of the murder," Peggy continued, "and didn't leave till hours after Black; and you know, pa, how Fitz went away, and how *you* went to bed that night, when you took the clock case for the income-tax collector, and struck him in the pendoolum."

"Yes, dear, yes," interposed Mr. Frecklenose, snappishly, "I remember *almost* everything. But I have done what I can for O'Brier. I have engaged Caldron to defend him, and," he added, with a tremulous voice, the tears gathering in his eyes, "and I've wiped his score off the slate!"

"My darling father," cried Peggy, "I did not know to what lengths your love and affection would go!"

Meanwhile Fitzdoodle pined in dungeon dire.

"Let the last of the O'Briers perish rather than she should know—know what I know. I will rather die the death of a dog without a sigh, upon the scaffold without a regret. A smile shall ripple o'er my face. If so be, if so be the exigencies of the——"

Fitzdoodle's monologue was interrupted by the entrance of Caldron, the eminent lawyer. Macduff Caldron had a kindly heart, but an empty brief-bag. He was already

famous as a legal luminary at the bar—the bar of the "Kilted Opossum"—and had settled several knotty questions at law amongst the habitués of that noted house, but had generally consumed his fees on the premises. Here, at last, was an opportunity to gain general notoriety. "None of your twopenny-halfpenny poker murders," he mused; "none of your trumpery cases of poisoning with the filings of a brass candlestick, but a good Gaborioox-like, cleverly devised murder, resulting in a chloroformed corpse served up in a rich sauce of circumstantial evidence. I am a made man!"

So this kind-hearted, disinterested lawyer walked into Fitzdoodle's cell, and took the prisoner affectionately in hand.

"I have come to you," said Caldron, "at the instigation of pa Frecklenose, as to your defence."

"I should imagine pa Frecklenose, after my remarkably strange behaviour, thought me guilty. I have been doing everything in my power to hatch up a terrible case against myself, and my best friends seem to believe me innocent! Confounded shame, isn't it, Caldron? What does Peggy say?"

"To her you are pure as an unwashen babe."

"Good old Peggy," murmured Fitzdoodle. "And the world of Melbourne—what does it say?"

"Believes you to be as black as the victim," said the great lawyer, smiling at his pun.

"*Jer mer mock doo hang deeratong*," cried O'Brier, with Parisian purity of accent.

"Yes, of course, *wee, wee—certennimong—wee, wee.* I quite agree with you," observed Caldron, with practised linguistic ease. "But that's not exactly the most useful line of defence. Suppose we adopt the plea of insanity, now? a most plausible defence."

"Yes, I have a good chance there," said Fitzdoodle, sadly, "but I'd sooner lose my head upon the scaffold."

"Only a very trifling effort is necessary," pleaded Caldron, in a kindly way. "No? Well, now, suppose we plead justifiable homicide?" suggested the astute lawyer.

"Can't very well do that," answered the prisoner, "seeing that I never homicided the man."

"Ah, to be sure, I had lost sight of that," said Caldron,

abstractedly, as he made a memorandum of the fact. "I have it—suppose we plead the exigencies of the——.? No? Well, I must admit the case is an interesting one You could set up an *alibi*—now, couldn't you?"

"I *could*, but I won't; it's so mean, don't yer know, after getting into such a deuce of a mess for the sake of a shilling dreadful. No! *Jeg swee—jee reste, mongchair.*"

"Yes, yes, *wee, wee, pom de tare preet a lahc batto vapour.* Quite so, quite so; still, you see, I am bound to get up a defence, to save appearances."

Mr. Caldron now produced pens, ink, and paper, and a little book called *Counsel's Vade Mecum*, an elementary catechism for the use of barristers, with glossary and key.

"Now, then, to work. *Q.* Where were you last seen with the co-respondent? No; that's 'Divorce.' Wait a moment! 'Forgery,' 'Kleptomania.' 'Where did you first kiss her?' No, that's 'Abduction.' Oh! here we are. 'Murders'—sub-division, 'Wheelbarrow Crimes.' 'How did you leave the deceased?' Here we are; now then, question and answer, briefly:—

Q. How were you dressed when you committed the murder?

"I didn't commit the murder, you brainless maniac; can't you understand that."

"*Wee, wee*, perfectly; but we'll take the questions as they come—it's the usual practice, don't yer know?"

Q.—When did you leave home on the night of the crime?

A.—Don't know.

Q.—Where did you go?

A.—To the Dressing-Gown Club.

Q.—When did you leave, and in what condition?

A.—I didn't leave.

"Follow the book, please."

"I tell you I didn't leave. I was *assisted* to the door, and politely requested—*you* know—*suaviter in modo, fortiter in re.*"

"Oh yes, I know—*wee wee;* rather hard hitter in the rear. But follow the book, please; there's a good prisoner, —now then."

Q.—In what condition? (Mem.—Do not insist upon this question when reticence is shown). "All right."

Q.—Where did you go?
A.—Elsewhere.
Q.—Whom did you meet there?
A—Somebody.
Q.—Female?
A.—What's that to do with you?

"Do follow the book; it'll save a lot of trouble, don't yer see; the question is, female? Now then——"

A.—Perhaps.
Q.—Where did she take you?

"Look here, old chap, I'm not going to tell you where she took me for all the *Vade Mecums* in the world. The exigencies——"

"There, you see," said Caldron, triumphantly. "I knew there was a woman in the case—you sly dog!" Here Caldron winked. "Pretty kind of *alibi*, ha, ha! Sally in our *alley, by* Jove! Ha! ha! ha!" Caldron exploded again and again with triumphal mirth, "He! he! he! now, then, ha! ha! ha! Hang it! I've lost the place. 'Obtaining goods under false pretences,'—Ha! ha! ha! here we are."

Q.—What was her name?
A.—Can't tell you.

"Then, of course, you know?"

"Yes."

"And you refuse to tell?"

"Quite right."

"That's all right, so far. Now, let's turn to another set of questions."

"But what is it all leading to?" exclaimed the prisoner, impatiently.

"I don't really know; I suppose we shall get at something soon."

Q.—Who is your favourite author?
A.—Gaberoo.

"That's a strong point in your favour O'Brier," said Caldron, making a mem. "I think we can dispense with the *Vade Mecum*. But what shall I ask him next?" he muttered to himself. "Now," he went on, addressing the prisoner, "I can pretty well guess what you did up to a certain point—what did you do next?"

"Find out, Caldron. I treated the corpse kindly—you

know from the papers how kind I was; how I called for a four-wheeler; how astonished I was when I found it was only a one-wheeler; how I expressed my disgust when I found the corpse in such a highly reprehensible condition; how I left him in consequence, and——"

"Well?"

"—— And went elsewhere——"

"Where?"

"Ask me another."

"H'm—what shall I ask him now?" thought the lawyer. "Oh, anything. Did you know he had it on him?"

"Did he have it on him?" shrieked Fitzdoodle, turning pale as a ghost. "*Then he did boil it, after all!* O Peggy! Peggy! he boiled it!—he boiled them!—he boil——"

Then Fitzdoodle rolled upon the floor, and took large mouthfuls of his mattress. Then he stood upon his head and tied his legs into knots. His grief was terrible to behold.

Caldron went to the door, summoned a warder, placed twopence in his palm, and whispered—"A pill, I think, will set him right—the right sort, mind, the right sort!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE GORDIAN KNOT.

THE aristocratic families of Melbourne, whose forefathers—the early dwellers in the colony—had no very enviable characters to keep unspotted from the world, were justly proud to have nourished in their midst a murderer in whose veins coursed the blood of an ancient line of kings. (Fitzdoodle XIX. was a contemporary of King Solomon, and co-director, with that wise monarch, of King Solomon's mines.) The ladies of Melbourne, whose grandsires had come over with the *Conqueror* (convict ship, B2), screamed with delighted horror when they learned who was the murderer; and the members of the Dressing-Gown Club, "in the block," ostentatiously arrayed themselves in their dressing-gowns and soft hats —the costume worn by the popular young assassin when he committed the crime. Everybody was charmed. Dishes were invented by Victorian *chefs*, and christened in the criminal's name—*Paté de Lapin à la Brouette O'Brier; Fricassée d'Alouettes à la Fitzdoodle; Glaces laudanisées au Cadavre de St. Kildaire*—and so on. And the meal of "thin bread and butter and Souchong," taken at all hours of the day by the *huppés du hig'-life*, was henceforth called "doing Fitzdoodle," on account of the staple topic discussed at those repasts. One young man of "literary tendencies" (a student of Gabiorio) was so struck with the "dramatic capabilities of the affair," that he forthwith fell to the composition of a shilling dreadful, calculated to take the starch out of all other competitors for the Government prize. A profound knowledge of the works of Gabberroo is indeed an acquirement affording immeasurable advantages.

Meanwhile, Caldron was doing a round of churches and chapels of every sect, gathering materials for his defence, and was greatly interested to hear representative

divines proclaim each one the sea-worthiness and safety of his own particular ark. Caldron was inspired. "Happy thought," he murmured to himself, "Fitzdoodle, Admiral of Fleet of Arks, gone to review fleet on night of murder! An Arkitectural *Alibi*, by Jove! Quite original—think about it." And he made a pencil mem. upon his forensic shirt-cuff.

Mr. Tol-de-Rolleston was now to be seen at various social gatherings in various strange disguises, which said much for the ingenuity of that young man's mind. He had founded an Amateur Detective Club under the distinguished patronage of Mr. Clawby; also an evening class for the elucidation of the more elaborate mysteries of Gabbero.

"Sure Fitz didn't kill Black," he would say to his circle of lady admirers, as he stood in their midst, his volatile little person disguised in the folds of a Roman toga,

"Then, do tell us who did!" cried the ladies in chorus.

"Aha! there's the rub," Tol-de-Rolleston would sagaciously reply, striking an attitude. "Only known to the 'tective mind. If I was only real instead of 'stinguished amateur, could put my hand on murderer without moment's hesitation. Grand 'xistence, 'tective's, don't yer know!"

Then would the ladies give admirable little screams of horror, and Tol-de-Rolleston would strut away to his club, or, changing his disguise, would arrest a friend in Fitzroy Gardens on a charge of, say, matricide, arson, or nothing at all, allowing his prisoner his liberty on payment of a drink or a cigar. Such glorious, rollicking times there never were!

It appears that there exist in our great and rising colony people who believe in the sanctity and connubial dotage of Henry VIII.;—who believe that that bluff monarch was actuated by the purest mathematical motives in making up a round half-dozen of wives;—who believe also that Nero, in dispensing with his mother, was tenderly solicitous of her future welfare, and that the apparent moral obliquity displayed by that youthful emperor was in reality the outcome of a passionate and loving heart. Amongst this class of Victorian philosophers were to be found O'Brier's most ardent friends. Others

really thought him innocent of the great crime laid to his account, but as their opinion could not have been based upon any reasonable evidence, their advocacy was extremely unpopular. Peggy alone sought comfort from them; but then women—and this is a great thought—women are strangely illogical. When she has once nailed her colours to the mast (in other words, "nailed" her man), a woman is not to be expected to surrender for a trumpery murder or two. A lady of my acquaintance, in Geelong, once brought an action for breach of promise of marriage, against her lover, who had evaded the matrimonial noose by adopting a hempen one. "We must draw the line somewhere" said the worthy magistrate who refused the award of damages, "and in this case a clothes-line is as effectual as any other." Women are like that, and Peggy was not an exception to the rule.

Caldron had not yet got Fitzdoodle's consent to set up an *alibi*. "Look you here," he said to his refractory client, "I know your case exactly. I've done it myself."

"Done what?"

"Well, you're afraid of getting into a scrape with some married woman's husband. The *alibi* you *could* set up would, in short, place you in the Divorce Court as a co-respondent. Don't attempt to deny it! I know it. Now, listen; you trot out your *alibi*, and I shall get a brief in the divorce case; I'd give you half my fees, and there you are, don't yer see."

Fitzdoodle mournfully refused the seductive offer; so Caldron, boiling over with anger and impatience, went away to the "Kilted Opossum," to cool his ruffled feelings with a pint of Frecklenose's home-brewed.

Peggy was serving in the parlour-bar, *vice* Frecklenose indisposed.

"My darling! I'm so glad you've come," she cried, eagerly seizing Caldron's extended hand. "How is my darling?"

"I'm rather chippy, dearest. I'm——"

"You horrid old person, I didn't mean you," explained poor Peggy. "My Fitzdoodle, my darling Fitzdoodle? how did you leave him?"

"*Alibi-less* as ever," replied the lawyer.

"What do they give my darling to eat? Bread and

water? Poor old dear! Take this, and these, and this little drop of special—*his* tap; and tell him—tell my darling, that pa's wiped the slate." And Peggy compelled into Caldron's spacious brief-bag a delectable pork-pie, some bilious Banburys, a small bottle of Frecklenose's "special Irish," and a flask of Bo-Vril. The kind-hearted Caldron shed tears of delight.

"Peggy," said he, when he had dried his eye, "do you really and truly wish to save FitzDoodle?"

"There's a question to ask, now! Why, of course I do. What do *you* think?"

"Because you know, my dear, I'm an unmarried man myself, and if anything *hempen* should happen to Fitzdoodle, why, there you are, you know—I'm here."

"You mean-spirited old wig-prop!"

"The fact is, there's a leetle affair of a delicate nature," interposed Caldron, thoughtfully, scratching his head, "which I can't exactly explain. It's Quixotic in the extreme."

"What's that?" asked Peggy, in alarm. "Anything catching?"

"O dear, no. I mean that O'Brier is Quixotic in his ideas of honour. To be brief, there's a woman at the bottom of the business."

"And is *that* what you call an *alibi?* the saucy minx! Let *me* see him with his *alibi*, that's all! I'll make it warm for them both!" And Miss Frecklenose looked really terrible.

"You had better come to the gaol, then, my dear, and have it settled off-hand."

"I will," said Peggy, with decision.

Caldron tranquilly finished his pint, and soon after, with Peggy on his arm, strode away from the congenial atmosphere of the "Kilted Opossum."

"Funny things, women. Can't understand 'em," murmured the lawyer to himself. "Balzac said something apposite and rather irreverent in the same strain; but as it's been badly translated I can't quote it."

"Lor', Mr. Caldron, I had nearly forgotten my cushion," cried Peggy, suddenly; and she darted back to fetch that very important accessory.

"Pa was fast asleep on it," she exclaimed; "but

Fitzdoodle's more to me than pa, and I can't save him without my cushion."

They found Fitzdoodle still inclined to be knotty, although at Peggy's appearance in his cell he divested his anatomy of most of its tortuosity, and became human and serene.

Peggy flung her cushion of tribulation to the ground, and, kneeling at her fated lover's feet, poured out her stricken soul in stifled sobs.

"Is it you, Fitzdoodle, for whom alone I live—you, for whom I would—er—die,—you, whom I thought innocent and pure of heart, like unto a tender lamb,—you, whose alimentary comforts have been my special care—is it you who would deceive me for an *alibi?*—a mis-er-a-ble *a-li-bi*—boo, boo, hoo!"

"What, in the name of wonder, does she mean, Caldron?" cried Fitzdoodle, relapsing into knots.

"Do you want my opinion of you?" replied Caldron, with emotion. "I consider you one of the most magnificent heroes on the face of the earth. Here is a noble and lovely damsel, filled with the strong passion of love, to whom, but an hour ago, I offered my hand and heart——"

"Your what? you asinine imposter!" cried Fitzdoodle, white with rage.

"—— My hand and heart, sir; my fortune and my fame—and who refused me for your sake—for a puling prisoner in a common gaol. But you, fired with lofty enthusiasm to become a hero of sensational romance, would crush her tender passion with an *alibi*——"

"Tell me who she is, my Fitz?" implored Peggy.

"I could not, O my sweet, divulge the awful, diabolical secret for which I am to die?" Fitzdoodle went into knots with poignant grief.

"Untie yourself, my love," moaned Peggy, "and tell me—tell me—who is this woman for whom you sacrifice yourself?"

"None other than you, my sweet."

"Than I," cried Peggy, indignantly; "do you mean to tell me to my face that I'm an ALIBI?"

"I cannot—I dare not speak. The secret that I learned that terrible night concerns you, my darling

Peggy, and its mighty weight would crush you to the earth, or send you drivelling to the lunatic asylum." Then he moaned in anguish—"*She might have been boiled—my darling!—she might have been boiled!*"

"Then, what *is* an alibi?" screamed Peggy.

"Caldron, with the aid of his *Vade-Mecum for Barristers*, and after an admirable exposition of the case in point, was able at last to calm poor Peggy's apprehensions. Then, falling once more upon her cushion of tribulation, she implored her lover to speak.

But Fitzdoodle, with a noble self-control, invested himself with the awful majesty of a Gordian knot, and remained silent.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CRYPTOGRAM.

"MR. CALDRON," said Peggy, sharply, "what have you got in your bag?" The eminent lawyer blushed to the roots of his forensic whiskers.

"Briefs, my dear. Fitzdoodle's case, you know—any quantity of briefs necessary in Fitzdoodle's case." Mr. Caldron was a keenly conscientious man.

"Hand them over then; I'm going to conduct the case myself." Peggy's face was glowing with ardour. Three-and-fourpence glistened clearly in each orb, and six-and-eightpence played upon her pursed-up lips. Caldron trembled beneath her Portia-like gaze.

"Call a cab, please; and tell the man to drive to the Dressing-Gown Club," was Peggy's next command.

"What the d-deuce do you mean to do?" exclaimed Caldron, pale with fright, dissimulating his "briefs" as well as he could.

"Never you mind," replied Portia, sternly; "do as I tell you. Do you imagine, sir," she continued, as they drove in the direction named—"do you imagine that because I am a woman I can do nothing? You shall see!"

"I will admit," said the lawyer, "that I have an excellent opinion of your sex,—which I consider a very chivalrous admission to make to a lady in distress. Ever since Eve destroyed Adam's peace of mind by absorbing that baneful pippin, the lawyers have been busy with the pips."

"Then, sir," said Portia, with dignity, "your close apple-ication to scriptural studies ought to have been more fruitful. But, *a nos moutons*——"

"*Wee, wee;* exactly," murmured Monsieur Chaudron.

"Fitzdoodle," continued Peggy, on the night of the crime left the 'Kilted Opossum' in a condition not compatible with his avowed intention of going *straight* home.

You smile, sir! Fitz probably called at the Dressing-Gown Club. I know the habits of the animal, sir. At the club he must have found a letter awaiting him."

"How do you know that?" asked Caldron, with surprise.

"Why, the exigencies of the——"

"*Wee, wee;* of course; I'd forgotten that point," said the keen-sighted lawyer. "Well; but who did he receive the letter from?"

"I sincerely wish you would flavour your desire for information with a little more English grammar, Mr. Caldron," observed Peggy, parenthetically. "From whom did he receive the letter? Why, from the mysterious person who wished to confide to him that alleged secret about myself!"

"Miss Frecklenose, you are an ornament to the bar," cried Caldron, overpowered with admiration.

"Fitz must have encountered Black by accident; but being in that peculiar mental condition, when objects coming within the range of vision invest themselves with a strange and shifting appearance of duality, he did not at first recognise his old rival"——("whom he placed with such tender care in the nearest gutter," added Mr. Caldron.)

"Precisely. I am convinced he did not return, but left the corpse to some less disinterested member of the Dressing-Gown Club."

"Then you intend to search Fitzdoodle's lodgings for the letter?" asked the barrister.

"Precisely. Of course, any reasonable being would have destroyed such a compromising document, but the exigencies of——"

"*Wee, wee;* of course; exactly. Needless to say more.

At that moment Mr. Tol-de-Rolleston made his appearance. Still as enthusiastic as ever in his 'tective-worship, he was rarely to be seen in Collins' Street undisguised. On this occasion he had dissimulated his dapper little person in a costume intended to imitate that of an *artiste* of music-hall renown. His boots, of the clog-dancing description, were highly polished, and glittered in the sunlight; his coat and trowsers were

profusely spangled and glittered also; his brimless beaver hat, many feet in height, glittered too; his face, with the exception of a white lozenge-shaped space surrounding one of his eyes, was suffused with lamp-black; and an ingeniously-contrived false nose, containing an incandescent electric light, glittered in unison with the rest.

Caldron sprang from the cab and accosted the brilliant amateur.

"Hallo, chappie," cried Leo. "Ya-hoo; you spring upon one like a *Deuce ex machiner*." Mr. Tol-de-Rolleston prided himself upon his "fair latinity."

"I must congratulate you upon your new disguise," said Mr. Caldron; "I scarcely knew you, I assure you." Mr. Tol-de-Rolleston shook him warmly by the hand.

"I say, Rolly, old chap, you couldn't come up to my place to-night, could you? I want your advice on a knotty point, with respect to the wheel-barrow case."

"Couldn't come on any account, chappie. Have three murderers and a sheep-stealer to 'rest, specially got up for the occasion, don't yer know. Xcursion night of Gabbero class, don't yer see. Awfully sorry; bye-bye."

"That young man has mistaken his vocation," said Caldron, as he re-entered the cab.

"Yes," said Peggy; "he is a highly-gifted young man. Here we are at the Dressing-Gown Club. Now, it's my turn. I'll carry out this contract." So saying, Peggy sprang lightly from the cab, and entered the club building. She was confronted by a waiter, who, in his hours of ease, was a diligent habitué of the "Kilted Opossum." A bland smile overspread his features.

"Good mornin,' Miss Peggy.——Been to see the poor young man?"

"Mind your own business," answered Peggy, shortly. "Now, I want you to exercise your memory, please. You remember Mr. O'Brier came here on the wheel-barrow night—did he have any letters? I don't want to use undue influence, but I promise you, if you can serve me, I'll see that the slate——you know what I mean."

"Thank you kindly, miss," said the waiter, much pleased with the prospect of liquidation. "There *was* a letter came, miss, brought by a young person, just

before midnight—a rude young woman, as says to me, 'Whiskers,' she says, 'take this 'ere note to the——' I won't repeat it, there!—and she gives me a letter for your young man, miss."—

"I beg your pardon," interposed Miss Peggy, sharply.

"——Mr. Fitzdoodle, I mean. Well, I takes it to him with the tongs, and Mr. O'Brier just opens it, quiet, like, and——well, there! I left the room! The way your——Mr. Fitzdoodle can quote scripture is just awful! Some time after that I had the honour to *assist* Mr. Fitzdoodle out"—here the waiter smiled benignly—"and I guess he went down them steps very easy, without givin' his legs much trouble."

"Thank you," said Miss Frecklenose, sternly; "when I have occasion to order you to be *assisted* out of the 'Kilted Opossum' I shall see that your kind attentions are adequately reciprocated."

As Peggy stepped into the cab, Mr. Caldron hastily put up his brief-bag. A most conscientious counsel was Mr. Caldron!

"Now for the diggings of my darling," cried Peggy. "If that letter aint to be found there, I'll eat my Ulster."

"The calm reasonings of the legal mind," said Mr. Caldron, "even after the most careful reading of briefs, are as nothing compared to the sweet feminine instincts of your heart. In future cases of the kind I shall appeal to you as a useful auxiliary, Miss Frecklenose."

"Thanks, awfully," said the young lady, drily.

They soon reached Mrs. Crackles's house. By what extraordinary effort of nature can tears have been squeezed from that lady's lachrymal glands? Post-mortem examination may ultimately shed some light on this abstruse question. We can only record the fact that a tear did ooze industriously from each of her eyes as she stood upon the threshold of her house. With pathetic cricks she conducted the lawyer and his fair client to O'Brier's room. There stood the waste-paper basket ready to be investigated. It was half-full—nay, it was more than half-full; but nothing in the world would have induced the searchers to glance—even so much as glance furtively—at that immortal waste-paper basket, until all the most unlikely places had been thoroughly explored.

They dipped into Fitzdoodle's hat-box, they investigated his foot-bath, they pryed into his pockets, they analysed his mattress, they peered behind the famous chromos, they dived under the hearth-rug, they shed tears of despair into the bizarre tea-things; they searched high and low, and far and near; finally, they opened his writing-desk. There they found strange things and wondrous—small fragments of female attire.

> The treasured glove, the unpaid washing-bill,
> The little faded flower, the *billet-doux*,
> Great records of wild betting, two to one;
> Long letters, telling tales of Moll and Meg,
> And "strange experiences unmeet for ladies."

Peggy closed it with a sigh and a blush. "Won't I just make him sit up," she mused.

"Nothing here," said Caldron. "Shall we have the carpet up, and look under the flooring?"

"No; ring for Mrs. Crackles, and analyse her curl-papers."

"Mrs. Crackles," said the eminent lawyer, when that lady appeared, "have the goodness to place your head upon this table."

"Wich I can't bend it, sir, owin' to the toob, wich bein' placed there for breathing pupposes——" Crick!

"We are desirous of investigating your curl-papers, my dear Mrs. Crackles," said Peggy, sweetly.

"Wich I s'poze you 'avn't got enough paper in that there baskit wich stands in the middle of——" Crick!

"My cushion, my cushion," cried Peggy, espying the basket at last. She fell upon her knees, and turned over the heterogeneous mass of torn and crumpled papers it contained.

Alas! Nothing there to shed one ray of hope. Peggy, weeping copiously, searched amongst the minute squares of paper for some sign of the wished-for letter. Nothing but little squares!

Suddenly the eminent lawyer uttered a cry of pain. An original idea had struck him. "Suppose," he said, "we take these little bits of paper, get Mrs. Crackles to lay them out (it was her profession once, layings-out),

number them, and stick them with the severest and most tenacious gum, upon a large sheet of brown paper. A clue might be discovered in that manner."

"A noble thought," cried Peggy from her cushion. "We'll hand them over to Mrs. Crackles at once."

The mechanical landlady was called, and fully instructed. She forthwith repaired to her kitchen, procured herself brown paper, scissors, and paste, and sub-edited that paper for several hours. Good Mrs. Crackles! She cricked merrily along, cutting, pasting, arranging, unpasting, and re-arranging, till she and the waste-paper basket were thoroughly exhausted. Then she ascended proudly to O'Brier's room and spread out her handiwork.

"Wich I'm real proud of it, young lady, as there's paper 'anging instincts in the fam'ly, as my uncle was a paper 'anger to the Victorian——" Crick!

Poor Peggy's heart sank into her hose. The microscopic squarelets were multitudinous as the lies enunciated during a "stumping" recess. Well might poor Peggy despair. Gentle reader, the specimen on the following page is only a fragmentary portion of Mrs. Crackles's now world-famous work—a mere tithe of the stupendous whole.

"What is to be done?" moaned Peggy, in dismay. The eminent lawyer—cynical man of the world as he was—suggested "lotto," but his frivolity was sternly rebuked.

"Poor Fitz," sighed the young lady, glancing over the sheet. "He always had a wonderful capacity for assimilating patent medicines into his system. That accounts for his grave and anxious countenance. Then, look here, Mr. Caldron, here are some of his drawings—*so* clever. There's pa, and *me*, too! And you, with your wig on——"

"D—n his impertinence!" muttered the barrister.

"And here's the coroner—and pa's legs, too. I know they're pa's feet—they're *so* large. Then here's Mr. Tol-de-Rolleston—a striking likeness; and Sir Frederick Leighton in spectacles. Fitz admired him *so* much—boo, hoo!—community of soul, he used to say—boo, hoo!"

"There, there; cheer up, cheer up," chirruped the landlady. "Wich there's Mr. Fitzdoodle 'imself weepin', poor dear; and that there's a hallegory—Law'r protectin' Wirtue——"


Dear Fitz
Wish you
Send back
of socks I
last week
only pair
Yours
Tol-de-Rolly
COCKLE'S PILLS
COCKLE'S PILLS
COCKLE'S PILLS
INSECTICIDE
26
Augustus
known correspo
last Australian
follows to The
PAIN KILLER
COD LIVER
Wristbands
Flannel Shirt
Collars
months overdue
Please oblige
probably
be elsewhere
If you will
pair of
heeled
last summer
4/6

Mr. Caldron again uttered a cry of anguish. Another original idea had pierced his brain.

"It is a cryptogram! I can see it! You count the little bits, divide the total by a given number, add three—and —and——"

"Well?"

"I don't know; but that's the principle. You remember the Shakespeare and Bacon controversy?"

"Wich I prefer's eggs with bacon, any day, as my fath——" Crick!

"What shall we do?" cried Peggy, with an eager look.

"Oh, we'll telegraph to Mr. Donelly, the cryptogamist. Wait, I'll see a detective this evening! The clouds do thicken, but the light shall come at last!"

Peggy prostrated herself upon the cushion, and breathed a prayer.

"Miss Frecklenose," said Caldron, sweetly, as they left the house, "don't you think—er—that as you're conducting this case, you had better pay our little travelling expenses?" But the cabman was fast asleep, so they passed on, buried in thought, and Peggy's heart was lighter now than it had been since the arrest of her Fitzdoodle.

That same evening, in the privacy of his own chamber, Caldron opened his "briefs." It was a brief repast. And when the wan, silvery moon, from her throne of fleecy clouds, shed her soft rays upon the great city, now hushed to rest by the gentle touch of the mesmeriser, Sleep, Caldron sat upon the floor of his little chamber, and (*Vade Mecum* in hand) searchingly cross-examined two empty bottles before an intelligent jury of Banburys as to the alleged disappearance of a pork pie under "s'spicious circumstan's."

CHAPTER XIV.

A MAN OF GENIUS.

IF the gentle reader should not happen to know the famous Fitzroy Gardens, he will have missed one of the greatest works of art ever wrought by the hand of man. We allude to the marble group representing the "great fight" between Clawby and Cowslip, the two most remarkable detectives of the age (the immortal Lecoq alone excepted). The ever-to-be-remembered Clawby, a man of unbounded stomach, stands facing the shadowy tapering form of the never-to-be-forgotten Cowslip, whose high imperious brow is deeply chiselled by the sculptor, Thought, and in whose eye (the one not closed) shines the unmistakable light of genius. This triumph of plastic art commemorates the occasion when the two immortals settled a fundamental difference of opinion concerning, amongst other matters, the famous wheelbarrow mystery. They met by accident. Mr. Clawby had just crowned his glorious career of twenty years' standing by the arrest of Fitzdoodle O'Brier, and the ethereal Cowslip bit his thin lips with mortification, when his rival saluted him from his loftier pinnacle of fame. His Olympian brow grew clouded, and he swore, in pianissimo semi-quavers.

"Have two penn'orth, Cowslip?" said Clawby, with a condescending smile.

"Dont mind if I do," assented the *farouche* genius. The two great men clinked glasses in painful and portentous silence. "Do you remember, Clawby," began Cowslip, at last, "some two years ago, in a certain murder case, when you went on a wrong tack, which brought you to a pig with a nasal hæmorrhage?"

"No," replied Mr. Clawby, sharply; "but I recollect that Ballarat murder, when your investigations led you to

engage the murderer himself to assist you in the arrest of a lunatic like yourself."

"A pardonable mistake, Clawby," retorted the man of genius, with a solemn gesture. "You forget that forgery affair, when you arrested a parson with two artificial eyes."

"A clerical error, Cowslip; but I never mistook a hot saveloy for a dynamite bomb, nor fled therefrom in terror."

"No; but you hauled somebody up for killing time," Cowslip hissed.

"My inquiries in a bigamy case never led me to incriminate the wife of my bosom," sneered Clawby, with a sarcastic smile. This allusion to certain irregularities in Mr. Cowslip's domestic machinery caused that gentleman to vent the full bitterness of his wrath upon Clawby's head.

"You ape," he cried. "Do you think you've got the right man now in this ere wheel-barrow case? Wait till I get a look in, that's all. You'll see what stuff my man's made of, you prying nincompoop."

Mr. Clawby rose in a white heat, caught the man of genius deftly by the nose, and challenged him, there and then, to mortal combat. A ring was formed, and the opponents "peeled," and set to work. We will not follow in detail the varying fortunes of this famous encounter. Suffice it to say, that Cowslip's slender form offered so narrow a target for his opponent's efforts, that Mr. Clawby's blows merely caused an atmospheric disturbance, whilst the man of genius was especially "busy" with Clawby's bounteous abdomen, and by a masterly on-drive in that direction gained a decisive victory. Sixteen rounds were scored, and the rounds of applause that greeted the eminent Cowslip brought the number up to a score.

Then Mr. Cowslip called upon Caldron. The lawyer plainly showed his astonishment at Cowslip's facial alterations.

"New disguise—eh? Very good; shouldn't have known you," said he, handing to the 'tective the stump of a verdant and incombustible cigar. Mr. Caldron was a born diplomatist, and knew that his attentions would

have their effect upon his visitor, especially afterwards. "Finest Havannah," he said, as he pressed the stump upon Mr. Cowslip.

"Now, then, to business. I have in my possession a most important document relating to the prisoner, Fitzdoodle O'Brier. It is of the utmost value, as at the present moment it is incomprehensible."

"I understand," said Cowslip, purring. "Go on."

"What do you understand?" asked the lawyer, sharply.

"Well—er—er. Go on, please."

"Don't be so precious smart, Mr. Cowslip. Look at this paper!" and the lawyer unfolded before the detective's astonished eye (only one being susceptible of astonishment) the important cryptogram manufactured in the last chapter.

"What do you think of it?" asked Caldron, after a pause.

"It's not what I should call a pretty wall-paper, but——"

"Imbecile; can't you see it's a cryptogram?"

"A what-gram? Never saw one before," said Cowslip, with an angry purr.

"You know all about the wheel-barrow case, of course. You believe O'Brier to be innocent."

"Undoubtedly; Clawby has closed my eyes to the possibility of his guilt," and Cowslip pointed to his damaged orbs.

"Exactly. Well, Fitzdoodle prefers to be hung, drawn, and quartered, for the sake of Australian literature, rather than save his anserine head by proving an *alibi*. Now, we've got to manufacture an *alibi* out of this cryptogram——"

"Can't see how it's to be done," purred the Cowslip.

"Stupid brute! Don't you see that there are fragments of a letter which evidently bears upon the case. A letter asking the prisoner to go to see a dying woman somewhere or other on the night of the murder?"

Mr. Cowslip again looked at the paper, turned it over, upside down, mentally computed its size, gazed steadily at it edgeways, submitted it to an olfactory test, all to no purpose.

"There *might* be a clue somewhere," he said, "but it's evidently gummed down."

Suddenly Mr. Caldron uttered a groan and put his hand to his brow. An idea was germinating laboriously in his brain, causing great cerebral discomfort.

"I have it," said he, "I have it! We must find it out by divination!"

"What's that?" cried the detective.

"Divination by cards, by magic, by what you will. Show me to some fortune-teller's abode. We will go at once."

"There's Madame Mudlark, I know, who tells the cards, and runs a fine business in receiving stolen goods and using her crib as an advanced hospital for women."

"What d'you call an 'advanced hospital?'" asked Caldron.

"A place where women go to die on easy terms," explained the detective.

"We'll go there without delay. Divination—dying women—Mudlarks and advanced hospitals! What a beautiful concatination of things, this remarkable romance doth lead us to! Wonder what on earth *it* can have to do with Peggy Frecklenose!"

CHAPTER XV

MADAME MUDLARK.

BOURKE STREET, Melbourne, is a very naughty place indeed—especially at night. Were it not that the exigencies of this thrilling story demand it, the author would have avoided that wicked thoroughfare by taking a "short cut," with the hard peas of propriety in his shoon. He would thus have been spared a shameful spectacle—ladies of the *demi-monde* being "moved on" by high-toned, whole-souled gentlemen in helmets; he would have been spared the inconvenience of hermetically sealing his ears with his two fore-fingers, lest words unknown of Nuttall or of Webster should strike upon his sensitive tympanum; he would have been spared the dismal strains of an itinerant band playing to an admiring crowd of "spectators;" he would have been spared the pain of mentally comparing Bourke Street at midnight with a certain thoroughfare in the West End of London, England, where Virtue walks secure, cherished and guarded by high-toned, whole-souled gentlemen in helmets.

Who shall dare to maintain, after a careful perusal of this immortal work, that the Australian is not a man of refined and cultured tastes?—that his love of and excellence in art, and science, and literature (especially literature) are not manifest? Marcus Clarke! Who's he? Let that gloomy philosopher but favour the author with a call—an entire change of opinions will be his reward, or a complete alteration of features his punishment.

Mr. Caldron followed the Cowslip into a slum—a real Australian slum. Not one of your paltry London slums, but a dark, hazy, weird, bizarre, crowded, grimy, out-and-out Melbourne slum.

"So much like the Seven Dials in London," said Caldron, "that I feel like Dante in the Infernal Regions,

with Virgil for a guide." The lawyer's was a mind of a high order.

"Don't know much about Virgil," replied Cowslip, sharply; "but I guess I could give him points in this locality. *You* may know more about the other place."

Caldron glanced up at the sky, of which a small square, glittering with stars, was visible above the grimy houses. "Looks like a pin-cushion," he said, with a reverent smile. Mr. Caldron's mind was deeply imbued with the poetic aspects of nature.

Hazy figures cowered in the dark corners, or slouched unsteadily along. Occasional "mild-looking strings" of blue Chinamen would break the monotony of the scene, stealing along, in Indian file, from cook-shop to cook-shop, inspecting the ready-cooked fowls and turkeys. These birds solicited attention by enticing looks. It was indeed a bizarre-looking, weird locality. Good old slum! Bunyan's famous allegory must have confessed itself a limp and starchless conception beside this Melbourne "Valley."

Their entrance to Mother Mudlark's residence would have been effected with more dignity had the lawyer avoided the rat-holes in the hall passage. With the greatest difficulty the detective extricated Mr. Caldron from these pit-falls, and the rats, squeaking and scampering in all directions, seemed in high glee at the success of their strategy, as the lawyer partially disappeared into the basement. He was an ireful man under ordinary circumstances, but as he hurled his *Vade Mecum* at the retreating rodents, his face wore an expression truly demoniacal. Then Cowslip, in a loud voice, requested space and darkness to inform him whether anybody was at home.

At last a faint light glimmered in the distance. "So shines a rushlight in a naughty world" solemnly observed Caldron, who was a professed student of Shakespeare.

"Will you step this way, please—this way to the Divination Chamber—Madame Mudlark is at home." A fairy-like child of remarkable beauty uttered these words. She had just accomplished a wonderful feat—that of lighting a candle with a match—and was smiling sweetly with childish pride.

"The stairs are greatly in need of repair," she continued, as she showed the way to the Divination Chamber.

"I should rather think so," groaned Mr. Caldron, whose legs again disappeared through lath and plaster, and emerged from the ceiling below.

They reached a dark and dismal door. The girl then drew from her bosom a whistle, and putting it to her lips, executed a weird bizarre-sounding melody. There was a scuffling sound within, as of hasty preparation for unexpected guests. Then the door opened, and a novel scene greeted Mr. Caldron's eyes. The room was small, square, and low, but although the furniture was almost primitive in its simplicity, and the wall-paper disposed to hang in graceful shreds and tatters (thus marring the æsthetic beauty of William Morris's original design), there was about the chamber an air of refinement difficult to trace to any visible source. The candle spluttering upon the table, though secured only by means of pins, burnt with a serene and tranquil light. A bottle of Schnapps, too, and a broken cup standing by its side, were noticeable (to the truly artistic eye) for the plastic beauty of their proportions rather than for the homely nature of their contents.

The presence of a young female, lying upon a truckle-bed in the corner of the room, would perhaps (owing to the scarcity of her clothing and the somewhat questionable tints of the bed-linen) have been objected to in the *salons* of Faubourg St. Germain, or the drawing-rooms of St. Kilda, but in this humble but refined abode it did not strike one as being out of keeping with the surrounding objects.

The lady of the house had evidently been displaying her magic arts to a young gentleman now upon the point of departing. He had known Mr. Cowslip in less cultured society—that of Pentridge (an eleemosynary dwelling-house erected by the Government on the lines of Newgate at London), and effected to treat the detective with high-bred disdain.

Madame Mudlark gave the visitors a warm reception. She was strangely attired for a lady of such refinement and courtly bearing. Bizarre-looking in the extreme, thought Caldron. Her robe was artistically festooned with rare impromptu embroideries *à jour*, and in point

of antiquity must have had considerable value. Her luxuriant hair, streaming in yellow masses around her, shielded in a large measure the picturesque defalcations wrought by the hand of Time.

She was not by any means beautiful. Her features alone—the attenuated sickle-shaped nose in communion with her chin; the wide lipless mouth (out of which a few yellow teeth protruded); the absence of eyebrows and lashes—would alone have sufficed to deprive her of a reputation for personal beauty; but a long flowing beard she tenderly cherished destroyed much of her feminine grace, as did also the singular rites of the *magicienne*, which precluded the use of soap and water.

Madame Mudlark, who had at one time been known in Imperial Courts (other than the Melbourne Police Courts), was of noble descent. She had been married in early life to Monsieur Caille de Ruisseau, but had been robbed of his loving care and tenderness by the ruthless arm of the law, in consequence of an improper use of his knife at the dinner-table (he had deprived his father, during the mid-day meal, of the latter half of his earthly existence). She had moved in the most aristocratic circles and *coteries* of cultured Europe, but was troubled with certain trifling moral imperfections which ultimately led her to assist the English Government in carrying out a large oakum-picking contract. She had finally honoured our great and rising colony by residing in Melbourne city, under the assumed name of Madame Mudlark.

The "lady of distinction" was still the key-note of her individuality, though habits and dialects contracted in the later stages of her life marred to a certain extent the harmonious blending of her many virtues.

Caldron, struck with her hirsute appearance, made an apposite quotation from Macbeth.

"You are a student of the immortal bard, I observe," said Madame Mudlark, smiling, and motioning the strangers to be seated. "Can my poor arts of magic be of service to you? blarst you!"

The sweet-faced girl now sidled up to her and said—

"*Madre*, have you had sufficient booze? shall I remove these vessels, mother mine?" and she placed her small hands upon the bottle.

"Nay, sweet child, let them remain, cuss ye!" And the delicate infant quitted the chamber with an airy tread.

The lady took a deep draught of the potent liquid.

"Mr. Cowslip," she began, after wiping her mouth with her beard, "this is not the first time I have had the honour of receiving you in my poor dwelling, d—n you! but may I know the business of the gentle stranger? blarst him!"

This was said with such winning grace that Mr. Caldron's face flushed with delight.

A faint moan came from the direction of the truckle-bed, followed by a fitful burst of song:—

> "Mary had a little lamb
> That gambled high and low,
> Its morals were not worth a dam—
> An orphan lamb, ewe know."

"Peace, *carissima mia*, blarst you," said Madame Mudlark, gently; "get on with your dying, *bambina*, cuss ye."

"There appears to be a glut of dying women in your—er—profession," hazarded the lawyer. "A lady expired here some few weeks since, I believe."

"*Basta!* signor is well informed, blarst him!" exclaimed the sorceress. "How did signor gain his d—d information?" Madame Mudlark moved gracefully towards the lawyer.

Mr. Cowslip stayed her progress by a significant gesture.

"None of that, mother; I'm here, you know."

"When I reigned as a court beauty at Versailles, blarst and cuss you, proud nobles were wont to strew my path with flowers. *Mon dieu!* wouldst thou stay me with thy blarsted boot, you bloomin', blazin' ijot!" The lady calmed her ruffled feelings with a copious draught of Schnapps from the broken cup.

The lawyer now produced the cryptogram.

"Madam," said he, "I have here a document upon which a man's life may depend. Can you by your occult science construe its portentous meaning?" And Caldron,

with wonderful tact and ability, rapidly explained the object of his visit.

"I think, signor, my art——"

The dying girl again interrupted them with a melody of peculiar sweetness.

"Stay, stay, A gentle maiden cried,
O do not ruthless B;
Tempt not the wild and stormy C.
The sailor-boy said D . . . !"

"Poor girl!" sighed the lawyer, when the pathetic sound had died away—"poor girl! her alphabet of life is nearly at its *omega!*"

"Cuss her *omega*," said Madame Mudlark, tenderly. "*Fille chérie!* are you or are you not going to turn up your toes?" Then, turning to the lawyer, she said, "I can read the riddle, *caro mio*, with my eyes closed! Listen! blarst you!"

"Tire-Botte Villa, Bookjack,
26th July ——.

"Fitzdoodle O'Brier.

"Dere Sir,

"I am in a great hurry to die, but I 'ave somethink verry important to comunicate to you. Matter presses, as to-morrow I shall probably be—elsewhere! Bearer will show you the way to my crib."

"Wonderful! wonderful!" exclaimed the two gentlemen together.

"And can you, by divination, tell me the name of the person who sent that letter, and where and at what hour Fitzdoodle O'Brier was taken on the night in question?"

"Certainly, signor, cuss you! Will you consent to be veiled?"

"If it is necessary."

Mr. Caldron's head was now enveloped in a dingy piece of bed-linen, but Mr. Cowslip flouted the oracle. "Not I, mother," said he; "I've seen you before, sweet lady!"

The sorceress produced a greasy pack of cards, which she shuffled and cut and dealt out upon the deal

table, arranging them in quaint and curious ways. Then, after a shrill incantation in an Eastern tongue, called Baks-lang, she said—

"*Caro mio*, the oracle has spoken, blarst him! On that fateful night, at the hour of half-past one, Fitzdoodle came hither to this chamber, and saw the dying woman of whom signor has spoken. So let it be. Abracadabra! Blarst you!"

"Wonderful! wonderful!" cried the lawyer, emerging from the bed-linen. "Did you see him—speak to him?"

"I did not, *mon ami*, cuss him! I was drunk, and he would have embraced me as I slept, *quil soit maudit*, blarst him! My grandchild, Polly Rawkins, poor waif upon the ocean of life, cuss her, took the letter to the signor, and he, with her, returned unto my poor dwelling at the hour named by the oracle, d—n him!"

"Were you present, O wondrous woman, at the interview?"

"I was, signor, but I was drunk, and heard not anything."

"Then where is this Polly Rawkins?"

"I know not, signor, blarst the poor darling. She hath drifted from the flowery path of virtue, and sitteth now upon the tin-tacks of vice."

Nothing more could be gathered from the oracle, and Caldron, bowing to the ground, wished Madame Mudlark "Good-day."

"Blarst and cuss you, *signor mio*, give me Brass!" said the sorceress, with a winsome smile. The lawyer dropped into her outstretched hands coins small and sundry, and departed.

"Let's have two-penn'orth, signor," said the detective, as the two stood once more beneath the starlit canopy of heaven.

"We will, blarst and cuss you!"

And they forthwith "willed."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TRIAL.

FITZDOODLE'S life, which might reasonably be expected to terminate at the end of a stout hempen cord, was now hanging, *pro tem.*, to a single thread, and that thread consisted of Polly Rawkins. This unnatural suspense caused an acute strain upon his nerves, which he relieved by relapsing every now and then into knots of anguish, and blankly refusing to unravel himself.

"It's knotty," said Caldron, one day; "but it's not nice of you."

"But the exigencies, the exigencies; you forget the——"

"O bl—ess the exigencies!" pettishly exclaimed the lawyer. He adopted at times the singularly imperative mode of speech of the great *magicienne*, Madame Mudlark.

"Why, in the name of Scott, didn't you tell us where you were, and what you were up to? The girl Polly Rawkins has disappeared. *Now*, where do you think you are going to end?" And Mr. Caldron went through an admirable pantomime suggestive of the long drop.

"Look at it from the standpoint of morality," continued Caldron, his legs quivering in the imaginary throes of suspension; "what have you to gain? You pass an hour in a disreputable slum, whilst in a condition not wholly in keeping with your known reputation for sobriety; you aggravate our natural suspicions by remaining silent; you send poor Peggy into fits—and all for no other purpose than——"

"Well," interrupted Fitzdoodle, sadly, "I've been trying to work it all out by Algebra lately, and find I'm in such a mess that the best thing I can do is to stop there. But why, oh why, did he *boil 'em!—boil 'em!*" he moaned in anguish.

"Boiled what?" cried Caldron, in rage; "boiled what?"

"You shall nevah, nevah know!" Fitzdoodle was every inch a hero.

"There you are, you see," said Caldron, in a resigned tone; "if you won't tell me what's boiled, and who boiled what, I'll be boiled myself if I can see what I'm to do—I'll never ask you again, I'll see you hanged first."

The day of trial came at last, and Fitzdoodle still seeming to deplore that something or somebody had been boiled instead of roasted, untied his last knot, and stepped into the prisoner's dock.

Tout-Melbourne was there, smiling and peptic. Mr. Tol-de-Rolleston had adopted a mild nondescript disguise—something between a Presbyterian parson and a Tyrolean bandit. He caused much amusement by arresting the judge on suspicion of concealing dynamite in the judicial wig used for important occasions. The bald head of the eminent magistrate was subjected to a percussive examination, and pronounced empty, amid cheers.

Peggy was there with her cushion of tribulation. This useful article had a most trying day. It was knelt upon in the cab, in the court, in the witness's room—everywhere. Left for a moment in an unfrequented corridor, it had caused the downfall of one of our rising young barristers, whose forensic wig flew from his head out of the window, and fluttered carolling to the boughs of an adjacent elm-tree. A most trying time had that poor cushion of tribulation.

Twelve clean and spotless gentlemen took their places in the jury box, and the Crown Prosecutor addressed the court. He gave a catalogue of witnesses for the defence, detailed their physical and moral peculiarities, after the manner of a wax-work showman, and called Mark Roysterer.

Roysterer, on being sworn, asked why they didn't keep a little drop of something on the "premises" for the benefit of (adjectived and emotional) witnesses. He had been informed, he said, by a (present participled) policeman that the (past participled) corpse was in court. He had been "introduced to it onct," and had had quite enough of it. I might go to——(another place) for all the witness (adverbially) cared.

His evidence, though a mere repetition of the facts

brought forward at the inquest, was strongly emphasised by his terse vernacular.

Cross-examined by Mr. Caldron, witness said that he reckoned the prisoner owed him a "tanner," inasmuch as he considered the transport of an (unpleasant) corpse was equivalent to double the ordinary fare. He admitted that prisoner was intoxicated, and that he, witness, at the time of the murder, was not so entirely a master of himself as he was of his (eternally-punished) wheel-barrow, and that he might have mistaken his lordship himself for the criminal; but he was not aware that there was any law against the temperate use of alcoholic liquor. The learned counsel, on reference to his *Vade Mecum*, said that witness was quite correct in his assumption, and was to be highly commended for his erudite knowledge of the laws relating to the consumption of alcoholic drinks.

Witness wished the court a (qualified) good morning, and retired.

The court was then fumigated.

Caldron sat down extremely dissatisfied, more especially so as the carpenters (who had recently been at work in the court) had left a large brad in counsel's seat, its "business end" aspiring towards a better sphere. This was, so far, the only point the learned counsel had scored.

Clem Rankin was next called, and repeated the evidence already adduced at the coroner's inquest. Cross-examination elicited nothing in particular.

Counsel.—Do you recognise the prisoner?

Witness.—Yes, your lordship.

Counsel.—Did you see his face on the night in question?

Witness.—Partially, your honour. I saw the limits—his chin, the ends of his moustache, and his ears.

Counsel.—Is that all? Do you think that sufficient to warrant such a confident assertion of identity.

Witness.—No, my lord. But if you'd only felt his boot! you'd have recognised him amongst a thousand.

The learned counsel, on reference to his *Vade Mecum*, said he was clearly of opinion that identity of features could not depend upon evidence relating to the weight and size of the prisoner's feet. He would add a foot-note to his brief, and meditate deeply upon the matter.

The learned counsel's careful demeanour upon resuming his seat caused some amusement in court.

Mrs. Gabbleton, the next witness, deposed that "men is brutes," in all senses of the word; that the conduct of the deceased in being ferried over the Styx without the usual warning had been highly prejudicial to witness, as her own "sticks" had been put to the hammer in consequence. The lodger was a quiet young man, and usually made use of witness's back door, on account of the tradesmen's frequent calls. The prisoner had once called upon the corpse and threatened to kill him in an open wheel-barrow. (Sensation.) Whether the quarrel arose out of a disputed under-garment or a love affair, witness was unable to say. She herself bore marks of the fray caused by one of the corpse's boots.

Cross-examination by the learned counsel for the defence only elicited witness's opinion that he (counsel) was as much of a "brute" as the rest of the sex.

Mrs. Crackles, the prisoner's landlady (who seemed to suffer from the feminine defect of loquacity, moderated by artificial means), was next called. She took the oath with a preliminary crick! and informed the court that her mother's great uncle's stepson had been a beadle at Ballarat, but—crick! She then deposed that prisoner, without being a "Wotary of Bakkers," sometimes returned home "intoxallicated." He returned in that condition just before two in the "morning" of the "night" of the murder.

Crown Prosecutor.—I desire to know, my lord, who's been making a fool of me? My brief distinctly gives the hour as two o'clock.

Witness.—With that owdacious doctor put the time in my mouth—and camomile pills too, which upset my calculations—as the clock was slow, and the linseed tea in wich I put my feet accordin' to 'is dilections made 'em that sore—an' Mr. Fitzdoodle came 'ome an' wound 'em round an' round—on the table—singin' "Somethink's gone wrong with the works." I mean the 'ands of the kitchen clock, as I felt that bad as I didn't know wether I was fast or slow, wich reminds me—— Crick!

Crown Prosecutor.—Just a leetle less circumlocution please, Mrs. Crackles.

Witness.—Crick! is it circum—crick!—location you call it? wich the doctor—crick! crick!—drat 'im!—called it a *sign o' quar non.* Crick! Oh! oh! crick! crick! crick! crick!"

Witness had espied our eminent detective, Mr. Clawby, standing in the court, and her emotion was so great that her further evidence was dispensed with.

Dr. Shinbone swore to the evidences of death displayed by the corpse. Witness knew deceased's constitution, as he had once had a large incisor extracted. Witness thanked the nobility and gentry present for their kind support, and solicited a continuance of their esteemed favours.

Mr. Clawby deposed that he was an experienced detective of twenty years' standing, and that he had crowned his useful career by arresting the prisoner. Witness thought that ought to be sufficient for the court. (Great applause.)

Mr. Lessland deposed that he was chiefly occupied on the night in question in throwing away his social scruples. He had finally thrown a small remnant into the gutter, together with himself. Deceased was very excited over a new theory he had propounded, as to the presence of trichinosis or microbes in the moon. Witness found himself in bed next morning.

Crown Prosecutor.—How did you get there?

Witness.—I am unable to say!

Mr. Caldron put up his brief with a weary air, when the court adjourned. He went away with two impressions—one, that of the hopelessness of his case; the other, that of the carpenter's brad. And as he disrobed for the day, he confessed he knew not which gave him the most pain.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FOUNDER OF THE RAWKINITES.

As a matter of course Polly Rawkins turned up at the eleventh hour. It would have been contrary to nature and the exigencies of this thrilling drama had she been one minute earlier.

Caldron was lying at full length on his office floor, buried in the cryptogram. Tremble not, sweet reader; he was not a stark and staring corpse, with the cryptogram for winding-sheet, but he had spread out that wonderful document, and, stretched upon his eminent stomach, gazed intently upon the tiny squares. Those forming part of the mysterious letter had been picked out in vermilion, for their better elucidation.

"Feel like Wellington surveying plan of battle," said the great lawyer, brushing a mosquito from his nose. He smiled silently with a silent look of pleasure in his face. (He had read Darwin on the Emotions, and was up to all kinds of tricks.)

There was a knock at the door, and Peggy entered. She gave a shriek and fell upon her cushion. "O, Mr. Caldron, with those red spots on the paper, you look like another *Mystery!*" Peggy, upon her cushion, smiled—Mr. Caldron, upon his cryptogram, groaned. "Heaven forbid!" he said fervently.

There was now a hoarse voice heard in the street. Both listened attentively.

"*Evenin' Moonshine*—Special 'dishun—Wheel-barrow case—one penny—Return o' Polly Rawkins—one penny."

Both sprang to their feet, but Peggy knelt again upon the cushion of tribulation. "Saved! saved! My darling! one penny! one penny!" and she swooned.

Caldron left his fair client upon her cushion and purchased a special *Moonshine.*

Polly Rawkins could have entered Melbourne followed by countless multitudes; but she came back, a humble pilgrim, a sweet saint, to the home of her fathers.

Peggy's cushion, and the young lady herself, were dispatched at once to the "Kilted Opossum," where the two spent many hours in communion; and Mr. Caldron (Dante), with Cowslip (Virgil) for his guide, once more penetrated the mystery of our handsome slum and entered the home of culture—the stately halls of the good *magicienne*.

That lady was welcoming her grand-daughter with her usual grace of manner and language. The lawyer, ascending the "rat-riddled, rotten-runged stairs," was so struck with the majestic tones that reached his ear that he fell headlong into the basement, and was extracted therefrom only with the greatest difficulty. The simple sweetness and cleanliness of the Divination Chamber did not extend to the lower regions of the house, and when Mr. Caldron finally stood before Madame Mudlark he was heartily ashamed of the wealth of cobweb and dirt adhering to his person.

As was only fitting for a being gifted with the power of second-sight, Madame Mudlark had been holding communion with the spirits—as the bottle before her testified.

Polly Rawkins stood listening complacently to the gentle admonitions of the lady of the house.

The girl wore a close-fitting black robe, long-sleeved and waistless, without that mystic artifice of vanity called a "bustle;" and a wide white collar puritanically starched, a sou' wester hat, long shoes without heels and white kid gloves completed her singular costume; but as she turned towards the lawyer and bowed stiffly, Caldron perceived that she had adopted the dual skirt, which did not ill become her thin emaciated figure.

"Delighted to see you again, signor, blarst you, in my poor dwelling, and you also, Cowslip, cuss you. Let me have the honour to introduce you to my grand-daughter, Miss Polly Rawkins, d—n her," and Madame Mudlark smiled tenderly.

Polly again bowed stiffly to the two men.

"My sweet child left me in solitude, with such small comforts as my mental resources could afford me, cuss

'em, and now she returneth to me with her bloomin' legs in a couple o' sacks, blarst 'em."

"That'll do, old un, you can leave 'em alone," said Miss Rawkins.

"*Carissima mia*, speak not thus to your aged grandmother, cuss you." Madame Mudlark wiped away a tear, and moistened her lips with a draught of schnapps.

Tho man of genius now stepped forward. "This," he said to the girl, "is the eminent lawyer who desires you to tell him what you know."

Polly Rawkins, when his errand had been explained to her said to Caldron, "As I'm the founder of a religious sex——"

"A what?" exclaimed the lawyer.

"A religious sex—I 'ope my past sins and follies will be forgiven——"

("Cuss her, *pauvre agneau*," sighed Madame Mudlark, with great tenderness.)

"I warn't always a model o' wirtue; but the surroundin's in wich I was brought up warn't particular convenient for the practice of stric' wirtue——"

(*Mignonne*, you're a liar," whispered the old lady with a smile.)

"——My parients was conspicuous by their absence, and this old hag——"

("Bless you, my darling!")

"——'As been my only monitor. When I left 'ere my 'eart was sore cast down. I jined a sex whose religious tenets was 'ombly, but noisy—I mean the Army. I fell away again into the arms of the wicked one——"

("Blarst and cuss him!")

"——Little need for me to detail the 'errors o' my ways. I 'ave now founded a new sex—the Rawkinites——"

("Cuss 'em!")

"——Our tenets consists o' diwided skirts, silent prayer, the vow of celibrity an' white kids. We go out into the world an' gather stray lambs——"

("Bless 'em!")

"——An' accept subscriptions an' donations, that's all."

"And have you any disciples?" asked Caldron.

"There's me, an' I'm enrollin' gran'ma—that's all. But you wants to know about the gentleman as come 'ere. He was just boozed—so was gran'——"

("My angel child, speak truth, cuss you!")

"——But I got 'imup 'ere, and *she* chucked me. They was together. Soon I 'ears the gentleman holler out, *'Boiled 'em! boiled! O my poor Peggy; she might have been boiled!'* Then he comes rushing out, wild as anythink. I took 'im back to the place I met 'im at. When I got 'ome, the woman was dead as nits; that's all."

"How is it you did not turn up before? There was a handsome reward offered."

"I was in the bush, gatherin' stray lambs,—black uns, that's all."

"Thanks, Miss Rawkinite. We shall require your presence to-morrow. Perhaps this lady will accompany you?"

"Signor, your courtesy does me honour, blarst you. Might I suggest that the handsome reward for the finding of my grand-daughter be handed forthwith to your humble servant, d——n you? I am at this moment engaged upon the prize work for the government competition, cuss it; but until the award, my pecuniary resources will be slender, blarst 'em."

"Madame, I will advise you fully upon the matter on my next visit."

Ere the two took their departure, Madame Mudlark bowed low, and, taking the lawyer's hand with the courtliest grace, she trod a measure of the stately minuet.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE VERDICT OF THE 'CLEAN AND SPOTLESS.'

MR. LEO TOL-DE-ROLLESTON awoke in a strange plight. He had returned late overnight, and after minute investigation (carried on on all-fours) in search of a clue, had arrested the towel-horse on a charge of furious driving. It was this object that first greeted his eye in the morning, by inserting one of its hoops in the optic of the clever amateur.

Mr. Leo Tol-de-Rolleston's next sensation was, that he experienced a certain bodily discomfort. This was accounted for, after an exploration, by the fact that the mild disguise he had worn in court on the previous day had only been partially removed. He was at first intrigued. A boot he espied on the hat-peg behind the door was not in itself sufficient evidence of alcoholic excess; but when Mr. Tol-de-Rolleston discovered his hat filled with water upon the washstand, his nightcap tied to a knot of his bedstead, and the stump of a cigar stuck into the mouth of an antique but cherished aunt—a speaking likeness—he confessed to himself that he must have been "going it" extravagantly. He rose, admonished his bed-fellow—the towel-horse—dressed himself with care (he felt too unwell to use disguise), and prepared to receive the honours due to his perspicacity.

A deputation of ladies then waited upon him. They expressed their highest admiration of his remarkable talents, and stated that his unflinching assertion of Fitzdoodle's innocence said much for the astute, far-seeing character of his distinguished eye and nose.

The court was crowded as on the previous day, and Mr. Tol-de-Rolleston's opinions were courted by all present. In his first glow of glory, Miss Topweight had thrown her heart and hand and her father's tripe (or the financial proceeds thereof) at Leo's feet, and he had

gathered them all to his bosom. He was a proud and happy man.

Fitzdoodle, as he stepped into the dock, had that "boiled" appearance which arose from his brooding grief. He looked resigned. His strenuous efforts to comply with the exigencies of sensational romance had told upon his stalwart frame. Truly, he looked boiled.

When Caldron rose to address the Court, Mr. Tol-de-Rolleston inquired, amid cheers, whether the learned counsel had "missed the point" he scored yesterday. On being informed that the brad in question had been removed, he replied, amid renewed cheers, "Then you're a *Miss Braddun*."

The first witness called was Mr. Leo Tol-de-Rolleston. He deposed that he felt rather chippy that morning, therefore not inclined to undergo the operation of cross-examination. He was a diligent student of Gobberoo, and in consequence fully qualified to express his unqualified opinion that prisoner was quite innocent of the crime. (Cheers.) The court had yesterday been able to judge of his—witness's—genius as a detective, when he had so thoroughly investigated the head and wig of the learned magistrate. (Renewed cheers.) Witness thought that his unbiassed opinion should be sufficient to ensure the prisoner's liberty.

The next witness was Scythinus Green, a waiter at the Dressing-Gown Club. He said he had assisted the prisoner down the steps of the club on the night in question, and was of opinion that he was not in a condition to follow a chalk line, much less commit a murder. A young person had, on that evening, delivered a letter for the prisoner, and the latter (with witness's kind help) had left shortly afterwards. If, in witness's opinion, the prisoner had any appointment with the young person in question, he could not say much for his morals.

("Blarst and cuss him!")

This parenthetical benediction was uttered by Madame Mudlark, who stepped with Polly Rawkins into the witness-box. She had been suddenly converted by her grand-daughter (a conversion due, principally, to that portion of the Rawkinite creed relating to subscriptions and donations), and had devised out of a patch-work bed-

curtain a picturesque divided skirt. She had come, she said, to watch over her *mignonne chérie*, blarst her, and addressed the court in her usual dulcet tones—cuss 'em!

Polly Rawkins said that she had founded a new religious sex, and that her aged grandmother was the first poor lamb to be gathered into the fold of the Rawkinites. ("Blarst and cuss 'em!")

She took a letter to the prisoner at the Dressing-Gown Club on the night in question, and afterwards conducted him to the Hall of Divination, to see a dying woman. She overheard part of the conversation, and was of opinion that it related solely to culinary matters. She led prisoner back to the place of meeting, made a careful mem. of the hour in compliance with certain exigencies ("Cuss 'em!"), and returned home to find the woman dead, and her dear grandmamma still drunk. (Bloomin', blazin' misrepresentation, *mon ange adoré*.") That was all.

This completed the evidence for the defence.

The Crown Prosecutor, with tears of contrition, confessed that he had been woefully deceived, and that he now regarded Fitzdoodle O'Brier as one of the greatest heroes of romance the world had ever known. Grief choked the voice of the learned counsel, and he hurled his brief at the nose of the eminent detective of twenty years' standing, as being mainly responsible for the deception, and, in consequence, of this undignified expression of sorrow.

Then the immeasurably great Caldron made that splendid oration which will never be forgotten as long as horse-hair wigs adhere to noble brows. A verbatim copy was immediately despatched to the Lord Chief-Justice of England, who, in a paroxysm of envious rage, flung it into the flames. But Pump Court and Chancery Lane still ring with those eloquent words uttered far away beyond the seas, and the muffin-man pacing those historic thoroughfares, hushes his bell lest its tones should mar the wondrous harmony.

When the marvellous harangue had terminated with an explosive peroration, a pin, dropping to the ground, tinkled musically. All slept. Judge and jury, prisoner and Peggy slumbered peacefully. Suddenly the voice of the irrepressible Tol-de-Rolleston was heard. "By jove!

he's done! bravo Caldron, splendid defence. Didn't think you had it in you. Bravo!" Then the sleepers awoke, and the Judge, somnolent no more, summed up.

Who shall describe the indescribable? the weird, bizarre silence, the fascinating stillness, the enchanting tranquillity which fell upon the court while the clean and spotless twelve were deliberating?

"By jove!" exclaimed the irrepressible, "feel like Christian martyr burying his head like ostrich in sands of Roman arena, with lithe forms of lion and panther smelling around for clue."

When the jury returned, every neck was craned, and every ear alert. The foreman stood up; then came a subdued buzz, and a sharp crackling, and an explosion. "*Not Guilty!*" A ringing cheer went up to the rafters, and the irrepressible performed a brilliant *cavalier seul* upon counsel's table.

The prisoner, alone, as he stepped from the dock a free man, hung out signs of anguish upon his pallid face.

"O why," he cried, wringing his hands, "why did he boil 'em—boil 'em!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE EDITORIAL HINGES.

THE next morning the *Daily Muddler* contained the following article :—

FIRST EDITION.

During the past three months we have repeatedly urged our readers to absorb, wholly and without *arrière pensée*, that truly wonderful aphorism, "Truth is stranger than fiction." The verdict given yesterday at the termination of the Wheel-barrow Case is still another illustration of its veracity.

But yesterday Mr. Fitzdoodle O'Brier was languishing, without a ray of hope, in a damp and dismal prison-cell. We have more than once had occasion, in the columns of the *Muddler*, to commend the existing Government for their close attention to the comforts of the misdemeanants of our great and rising colony, but when we reflect upon the copious gloom of the prisoner's cell, in comparison with the spiritual light of our Editorial Sanctum—when we think of the probable discomforts of such a dwelling—when we picture the homely squareness of the cell, the difficulties of egress, the presence of spiders, cockroaches and other domestic rodents—the Editorial mind is completely unhinged, and we fear we shall have to abandon for a while the remarkable work of fiction, based upon the Wheel-barrow Mystery, which has recently been flowing from the Editorial pen in view of the munificent reward offered by the government. We can keenly appreciate the poignant grief that this announcement will excite amongst our intelligent readers, and those whose subscriptions become due at the end of the present month should renew without delay.

We have always concurred with the views set forth in the government proclamation, to the effect that the criminal was, in some measure, actuated by motives of

literary patriotism ; but we fail to understand the determination and self-abnegation displayed by Mr. Fitzdoodle O'Brier in undergoing an unnecessary term of uncomfortable incarceration for the obvious purpose of complicating this darkest of mysteries.

This is one of those abstruse questions which combine to unhinge the Editorial intellect, and make the frequent use of Lindley Murray and beef-tea a matter of imperative necessity. The Government prize was, it will be recollected, to be awarded to the writer of the best sensational romance based upon the facts disclosed at the Coroner's inquest. What need, therefore, for an innocent man to suffer imprisonment on a false charge of murder, entirely upon his own responsibility?

These are the reflections which destroy the perfect balance of the Editorial mind, and the remainder of this article will appear in a subsequent edition.

Recuperation of our mental powers by means of refreshing rest and generous stimulant, has now become a constantly-recurring necessity.

SECOND EDITION.

In the interval of tranquil meditation which the Editorial intellect has enjoyed, a mental spark has been emitted from the flint of Thought, and we hasten to issue another edition, to afford our idea the ventilation it deserves. It is this :—The very article now flowing from the Editorial pen may meet the eye of the real assassin, and he may be at this moment convulsed with merriment over our first edition, although, to our mind, hilarity would be unseemly in connection with our lucubrations. Let him beware. Justice is *not* blind, though the symbolic handkerchief which covers her eyes may lead him to think so. She may at any moment tear the cambric from her eyes—at the dinner-table—during the solemnisation of church ritual—even in the morning bath—may seize him by his criminal hair, and drag him forth into the light of day to receive his reward. We do not allude to the government prize, as the assassin and children under ten are excluded from the competition. Our detectives.—Oh me! there's the Editorial mind unhinged again!

We will issue a special edition.

SPECIAL EDITION.

In the momentary respite snatched from the tortures of Editorial duty, we have remembered our time-honoured custom of analysing the *causes celèbres* of our Victorian Police Courts, from the standpoint of romance. Those who have studied the "murders grim and great" concocted and carried out in the masterly chapters of Gaberioo—in the florid works of De Quincey—in the peptic pages of Carlyle—(even the great Macaulay has called attention to the "burglars of Carlyle")—will feel a thrill of horror in their arterial ducts when they reflect that a devil incarnate is in our midst. That such an one should be at large is, in a large measure, a danger to the community at large. We have already pointed out that the assassin is obviously a student of Gaberio-oo, and, as it is an established fact that truth is stranger than fiction, we are at a loss to follow the natural course of reasoning through which such reflections should indubitably lead us. The Editorial mind is unhinged at the very outset. Can our intelligent readers contemplate with complacency the terrible possibility of the Editorial windpipe being subjected to the assassin's knife during his unstrung moments? Oh, no! at the very thought the Editorial mind is unhinged!

We may possibly issue a later edition.

CHAPTER XX.

ZOLA AND BOILED BABY.

AUSTRALIA is a "realm of topsy-turveydom," as well it might be with the "*sun* one hundred odd in the *shade.*" On a Christmas day the very plum-pudding must have felt itself to be a sad anomaly—ready to shed its exterior plums in sheer disgust at the obvious frauds perpetrated by all astronomers from Philadelphus to Christie.

But our Peggy, on this same Christmas day, three months after the acquittal of her Fitzdoodlian hero, had no thought for the peculiarities of Australian astronomy and the great Sir Issac, himself, stepping into the "Kilted Opossum" for necessary refreshment would have been charged the same price as any other less astronomical mortal. But we must leave the "Kilted Opossum" for a while.

Peggy was now "sitting on the wide verandah" of the homestead of Yabboo Yabboo, a temporary country-residence Mr. Frecklenose had rented for the hot Australian Christmas season. She was engaged in surveying, through "a slit in the blind," the natural phenomena without. Most Australians do that at Christmas time. She saw a "haze rising from the heat," which in itself was enough to make her feel ill. She saw flowers so "vivid in colour" that they caused a rush of blood to her cheek. She saw a round pool containing a "still sheet" of superfine water, and many other things strange and noteworthy.

No wonder then that the mysterious romance she had been reading should have been allowed to fall to the ground. It was the romance for which the Victorian government had awarded the prize of one hundred pounds; and was written by no less a person than the experienced detective of twenty years' standing. In these graphic pages Mr. Clawby had given full play to his detective

genius, and had invented a plot so complicated and mysterious that the hero (of whom the author himself was the prototype) had been compelled at last to arrest the corpse on a charge of wilful suicide, in order to wind up the story at the stipulated limit.

Peggy now abandoned the "slit" and the outside world, and took a world of her own—M. Zola's *Terre*. "Only a *terre* by the wayside," she murmured, as she dipped into its mystic pages.

Suddenly she heard a footstep, and the founder of the Rawkinites stood before her. Polly Rawkins had been engaged by Miss Frecklenose as lady-companion, and, in return for instruction in that nomadic Eastern language known as Baks Lang, was receiving lessons in spotless English. Polly, who had been reading Macaulay's *Essays*, had come to return the book to her mistress.

"I prefer Haddison or Hume," she said. "Their powerful and flexible English would well serve to convey to the world the humble tenets of the Rawkinites. Read me some of this," and she pointed to the yellow-coloured book on Peggy's knee.

Together they dipped into the dictionary and Zola. Soon Polly rose. "Mademoiselle," she said, "I am but the founder of a humble religious sex, but I should qualify that book as naughty." Then she took a large piece of brown paper, crumpled it into the semblance of a torch, lighted it, and solemnly fumigated the room.

"Thanks," said Peggy; "I was getting rather terre-ified."

"Yes; it was real torch-ure," returned Polly.

Now, Fitzdoodle still presented that *boiled* appearance he had exhibited on the day of trial, and Peggy was wrathful thereat. So it came to pass that Miss Frecklenose, on this Christmas day, cross-questioned her private secretary about certain events relating to this thrilling drama; and that young person in divided skirts divided her attention between Peggy and fumigation.

"As the founder of a religious sex, I'll speak the truth," she said:—

"Madame Mudlark was givin' a *seedncy* one night, and was in the middle of a recantation (*you* know—*abracadabra*) when in pops the woman as died. As they

was both drunk (Haddison, perhaps, would say inebriated), they sends me for refreshment. When I returns, they was thick as thieves. Then they chucks me out, and I heard no more till the corpse called——"

"Oliver Black?" cried Peggy, aghast.

"Yes, Holiver Black. He called several times and interviewed the diseased, as Haddison would say.

"The last time he called, I accidently overheard 'em thro' the keyhole. She gives him a paper, and says, 'That's it.' Then he read out some funny names, and, last of all, he reads '*Boiled Black Baby Snuffit.*'"

"What?"

"'Boiled Black Baby Snuffit.' Then they goes into fits. Says he, 'That'll do now; you can get on with your croaking,' and he took the papers away with him. But she didn't croak not till after she'd seen Mr. Fitzdoodle, and tells him Mr. Black had got it. I accidentally overheard *that* conversation through the keyhole."

"Black's?" mused Peggy. "Do you think they meant Boiled *Black's* Baby, Snuffit?"

"Don't know; p'raps they did. Mr. Fitzdoodle sings out, '*Boiled it—Boiled!* O Peggy, my darling, she might have been boiled!'"

"Then you know the rest! But he says, before he goes, 'What's yer name?' an she says——"

"Speak, child."

"——Susannah Burgess!"

As the tall figure of O'Brier emerged from behind Peggy's chair, he looked more "boiled" than ever.

CHAPTER XXI.

"O, FLY WITH ME!"

"WELL?" said Peggy, flushing to the roots of her hair. The two were now alone, and Miss Frecklenose was "boiling" with rage.

"What's all this I hear about boiled black babies 'snuffing it?' Is *this* the secret that weighs upon your mind? Is *this* the secret concerning myself? Am *I*——" here Peggy blushed like a peony—"am *I* to be held responsible for a black baby b-b-boiled? *Sir*, I would have you know I'm a respectable young Australian lady, who—who——" Here the indignant Peggy broke down utterly.

Fitzdoodle tried to soothe her with a bit of Browning—

> "Where the apple reddens
> Never pry,
> Lest we lose our Edens,
> Eve and I."

"What has Eve got to do with a boiled-black-baby? Oh me! oh me!" broke in Peggy, weeping bitterly. "And what have you, and Susannah Burgess, and the corpse got to do with a boiled-black-baby?"

"Hush, hush! Peggy, it will all come right in the end—the exigencies of the——"

"Bother the exigencies! Sir, I have yet to learn that a boiled black baby is one of the exigencies of romance!"

Fitzdoodle fell upon his knees. "O my sweet Peggy," he cried, "let me alone bear the weight of that boiled baby in my breast! I cannot tell you, dearest, all I know—the horrible thing would blight your young life for ever. It concerns you only indirectly, through a third person." Here Peggy started, with an indignant gesture. "Let it rest, my darling—let the d—d boiled baby rest!"

Peggy was soothed. "Darling," she said, "it shall be as you wish."

"Now, dearest, I have something to tell you—I have sold my station. My cattle on the light fantastic toe have skimmed the prairies with the wings of haste. They have all gone, my love!"

"All gone! Where, my own?"

"I cannot tell you, sweetest. Wanted change of air, perhaps."

"How many head of cattle had you, dearest?"

"Three, my sweet."

"Alas!" Then there was a pause.

"But, sweet, I came to ask you to be my wife—at once! We will marry, and leave this country. We will leave the shadow of the boiled nigger behind. 'Come into the garden, Maud: for the black brat, boiled, has flown.' Wilt thou, my own?"

"I will!" Then soft sounds of osculation clove the stilly air. "You must ask pa, you know" said Peggy, presently. A frown passed over Fitzdoodle's face, and his brow wrinkled angerly.

Peggy's father at this moment hove in sight. Mr. Frecklenose's face wore an anxious expression, and Fitzdoodle, as he reluctantly took the extended hand, wondered whether the wheel-barrow mystery had anything to do with it.

"How do, Fitzdoodle?" exclaimed Frecklenose; "just in time to pick a bone with us. Stay to dinner, won't you?"

"Well," said O'Brier, "I have another bone to pick with you—may as well kill two birds with one stone. My three cows, ancient, have shot the wan, sweet moon, so I've sold my station. I want to marry Peggy off-hand, and trip it gently round the teeming earth."

"Impossible; the 'Kilted 'Possum' requires her services."

"Hang the 'Kilted 'Possum,'" cried Fitzdoodle, impatiently. "Are her young years to glide through beer-engines? Is her young heart to be sepulchred in Banburys?"

"No," returned Mr. Frecklenose; "you put it in such a poetical light that I can't refuse. Bless you, my children!"

Then pa Frecklenose took "an arm of each," and led them in to "pick a bone."

CHAPTER XXII.

DINNER AND DOVETAILS.

GABERORIOO, greatest of writers, once broke out in song; but only once,—just as whooping-cough generally breaks out once in children. He sang—

> "'O love! my love! when in your eyes—
>   (Those gentle eyes of speedwell blue!)
> There lurks a dream of paradise
>   That angels whisper unto you;—
> When in their deeps a heav'nly light
>   Lends lustre to their sweeter heav'n,
> Twin stars are they, and I?—the night;'
>   The maiden sighed, 'We dine at seven.'"

It is obvious to the Victorian eye that that maiden must have been a tough unmarried spinster, who thought more of Brillat-Savarin than of Ovid. The gastronomical treatise of the Frenchman had evidently taught her to display her alimentary yearnings—those "dreams of paradise"—in the pure "speedwell blue" of her "gentle eyes." And what had Ovid taught her? Bah! comparisons are Ovid-ious.

Frank Frecklenose was one of those great men—alas! how few there are upon this terrestrial globe—whose souls are entirely absorbed in their dinners, a spiritual phenomenon of more frequent occurrence than that suggested by the antithesis—viz., that of their dinner being entirely absorbed by their souls. The "art of dining" had occupied his mind during many years, and he had arrived at the conclusion that the choicest of dishes, unless it be served up under the subdued light of a "pink-globed lamp," is not worth pepper and salt. He had frequently spurned the soothing saveloy, and treated

with disdain the passive onion, solely because of the absence of the "pink-globed lamp."

Mr Frecklenose therefore *had* a "pink-globed lamp." He had, moreover, an innate genius for inviting guests who "dovetailed into one another." Any *invité* sitting down to dinner without exhibiting his dovetail—even under the pretext of wearing a swallowtail—was looked upon as a very unsociable and reprehensible person.

Fitzdoodle was in riding dress, and his absence of dovetail could be excused under existing circumstances (had he worn one, it would most probably have been "boiled"); but Mr. Tol-de-Rolleston and his wife, the fair flautist—*née* Leonora Topweight—had very extensive dovetails indeed. Cerulia Topweight had adopted a subdued dovetail, with which she fanned the flame she supposed she had kindled in Frank Frecklenose's breast; Mr. Materson, a young Britisher, had brought with him a pleasant, perky, cockneyfied dovetail; Dr. Shinbone, the eminent dentist, sported a troublous dovetail, strongly impregnated with myrrh; and papa Topweight, the wealthy purveyor of tripe, indulged in a dovetail, well-meaning enough, though partly plumeless with age. As to Frank Frecklenose, he kept his dovetail to himself.

Mr. Tol-de-Rolleston, as we have said, had an irrepressible and adaptable dovetail, so with a preliminary whisk he started a political topic,—"Great and rising colony going to dogs, don'tchernow,—wants a Randolph Churchill put things straight. Going to set up in that line myself, don'tchernow; fourth party! When Frecklenose prime minister, badger him till he's blue, and all that sort of thing, don'tchernow."

Then "every one smothered a smile," and the poor little germ of hilarity expired in agony.

Medicine then "dovetailed" into politics, and a discussion ensued as to the precise position of the pancreas in the human frame, much to the detriment of that organ, which was finally relegated by a concensus of opinion to a place underneath the left shoulder blade. Next, Mr. Topweight spoke of early colonial days, when Frecklenose and himself were neither Josephs nor St. Antonys, when Miss Susannah Burgess, belonging to the *corpse de bally*, had kindled an erotic flame in the bosom

of the host, whereupon Frecklenose turned pale, and spilt a spoonful of goose-gravy adown Cerulia's emerald robe.

"Tell us s'more 'bout Susannah, old 'un——highly interested," cried the Irrepressible.

"Ask Frecklenose," returned the wicked old gentleman, with a malicious chuckle; upon which Frecklenose rose, and papa Topweight passed a *mauvais quart d'heure!*

As soon as the guests had adjourned to the drawing-room, Mr. Tol-de-Rolleston had a still more unpleasant time of it. His unseemly interest in Susannah Burgess (a common ballet-woman!) had ruffled the feathers of the connubial dovetail.

Mrs. Tol-de-Rolleston, since her marriage, had abandoned the flute, but her sister, Cerulia Topweight, had, as usual, brought her cornet-à-piston. To her great annoyance, however, it was found that an inquisitive mouse had expired in one of its bends, so the customary solo had to be dispensed with.

The Irrepressible, too, was to the fore. "Have sweet new song, own composition, don'tchernow," cried Leo, sitting down to the piano; "here goes."—

"SOMEWHERE."

A flying crowd, a butcher brave,
  A bright light in his murderous eye,
A voice that, from an alley, gave
  A savage sound, a dreadful cry.

I know not, sweet, where it may stand
  With tail erect, and bristling hair,
Yet by that sound, I understand
  A maddened sow's somewhere!
    Somewhere, somewhere,
    I fly, my lady fair.—
    I felt a sudden searching pain
      Somewhere, somewhere.

"'Somewhere! somewhere!'" cried the Irrepressible, in imitation of the itinerant hawker of song books.

"'Somewhere! somewhere!' twenty-four songs for vun penny——'' 'Comin' thro' the Rye,' 'The Lorst Cord,' ''Ark I'ear the angels sin',' 'The 'orn o' the 'unter,' 'Arf a mile from Edinboro' town,' 'Felishah's Francies,' —— very funny, 'Turkish delight,' and 'A Jubilee Hode to Her Majesty,' —— vun penny. Pipe up Villiam an' give the ladies an' gen'lemen a toon! Twenty-four songs for vun penny!"

The attention of the company was now directed to Mr. Frecklenose, who, convulsed with laughter in a corner of the room, exhibited unmistakable signs of approaching apoplexy.

"O pa," cried Peggy, "you look like a purple pumpkin, and what's the good of my sewing your buttons on—they're going off like coffins out of the fire!" At that moment a button, flying into space in the manner described, struck upon the nose of the Irrepressible, and Mr. Frecklenose was commanded, for obvious reasons, to quit the room.

Leo's song was greatly admired.

"Not like those mystical things of Browning's," said Dr. Shinbone, "where the point is obscured by sophistries and painfully-involved parentheses. In this simple ballad the point is obvious."

"At any rate the young man was painfully impressed by it," put in Tol-de-Rolleston, gaily. "I don't suppose he sat down to study Browning for a considerable length of time."

Cerulia next throned upon the music-stool. She sang "Sound an Alarm," and Handeled it in a masterly manner. The finished vamping of her accompaniment was rewarded by unanimous praise. "Handel not in it!" cried Leo; "never composed anything like it all his life!"

Meanwhile Peggy and Fitzdoodle had seated themselves upon the margin of the pool, which shimmered beneath the starlit dome of heaven. Soon the distant sounds of a waltz broke the silence, and shadows of happy couples flitted across the window blind. "Looks like a shadow dance," said Fitzdoodle, solemnly; "thus flit the dreams of youth across the window-blind of life!"

"Oh, darling! you are a born poet," cried Peggy, with enthusiasm; "you remind me of Tennyson."

"Tennyson! He wouldn't have a ghost of a chance if I were to publish my great poem in four cantos—not the ghost of a chance."

"Do you believe in ghosts, dear?" asked Peggy, simply. Her sweet thoughts, effortless, took no ærial flights beyond the uttered word.

"Ghosts? Oh, yes; have a family ghost, a Banshee, or She-ghost, haunts the ancestral halls of the O'Briers, and all that sort of thing. But, pshaw!" he added, gloomily. "There are no ghosts but those of a man's own raising—boiled black babies—boiled black babies!"

Then they rose and walked in silence back to the house, and a bat flew whirring round their heads with a ghostly flutter of leathery wings. Peggy, terrified, ran forward towards the house. "She is scoring a run off the bat," muttered Fitzdoodle, with a spectral smile.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ENO'S ! ENO'S !

PEGGY FRECKLENOSE and her lady friends were disporting themselves in a meadow hard by the homestead of Yabboo Yabboo. With the assistance of the Irrepressible and Mr. Materson they had pitched a passably bumpy wicket, and, notwithstanding the excessive heat—(the *sun* was one hundred and one in the *shade*)—the members of the little party were enjoying themselves heartily. Peggy, now untrammelled by the four counters of the "Kilted Opossum," was as vivacious as any cricket, as, bat in hand, she pranced merrily about the popping crease.

"Over!" cried Leo, (who was bowling insinuating "slows;") and the "leather" at that moment flew over an adjacent wall. "Over the garden-wall, Materson; after it, boy; show the ladies how a cockney looks, foreshortened."

Mr. Materson—'pricked on by knightly spur of female eyes'—scaled the bricks and mortar, and alighting uncomfortably upon a prickly cactus, sent up the ball. This act of trespass on the neighbouring property was resented by a large heavy-jowled mastiff that came hurrying to the spot. Materson hazarded a flying-leap. The dog, however, seemingly wishful to test the quality of white flannel worn by the amiable cockney, hindered the latter's progress by adhering firmly to the material.

"They'll have a guinea to pay between them, for cutting the cloth!" cried the irrepressible in high glee.

Poor Materson, bisected by the bricks and mortar, and withheld *à posteriori* by canine persuasion, sent up a plaintive cry of discomfort.

"By Jove! It's like an allegory," again cried Leo. "Medieval Superstition clinging to Modern Truth."

Just then Modern Truth revealed its inner glory, and

Medieval Superstition vented its impotent rage upon the flimsy veil it had rent away. Modern Truth came tumbling back into civilisation and cricket, and modestly retired for repairs. Alas! the world will ever spurn the naked truth.

Cricket continued, and Peggy being soon out, l.b.w., resigned the "willow" in favour of Cerulia. Fitzdoodle now joined the party. His "boiled" expression was more accentuated than ever, and he looked worn with fatigue, as though he had been burning the midnight oil.

"Come and bowl for us, dearest," cried Peggy, running towards him; "we've all been waiting for you, anxiously."

Fitzdoodle smiled limply and took the proffered ball. He bowled overhand, underhand, and round arm, fast and slow, but his balls were fearfully and wonderfully wide, and Cerulia "slogged" the atmosphere with surprising vigour.

"Oh! I cannot bowl, my love, I cannot bowl!" cried Fitzdoodle suddenly to Peggy, who was fielding at point. "I feel as though I was bowling boiled babies!"

Peggy grew pale, and her gentle eyes were dimmed with gathering tears.

"Has anything happened?" she asked, anxiously.

"Yes! I've had a long letter from Caldron, dearest; twenty-eight pages, crossed!"

"Tell me all about it, dear," said Peggy tenderly, when Fitzdoodle had relinquished the "leather."

"Oh! darling, I am aweary, aweary; twenty-eight pages, crossed! First of all, he told me the land of Goschen was situated 'by the rolling waters of the Murray;' then he said that he'd liv'd in Arcadia, and found it a 'lotus-eating Paradise;' then he called me 'Corydon'——"

"What's that, dear?"

"*I* don't know, love. Then he went on to say he was 'deep in the musty leaves of Themis' volume,' which he said was an 'artificial daughter of Nature,' and so on. Next he went into a long, long history about Susannah Burgess and Black, from the creation upwards—went right through the whole demented wheel-barrow business—twenty-eight pages, crossed! and by the time I got to bed this morning, 'the sun was peering over the brim of

the wide plain,' wondering what the deuce I could be up to!"

"Poor darling!" said Peggy, compassionately; "I don't wonder you look ill!"

"I should think so, indeed; he quoted Virgil and *The Argus*, referred me to Balzac (bother Balzac!), talked about the Bayeux Tapestry, said he was like Praed's Vicar; 28 pages, love! It's a precious wonder he didn't say anything about Gaboilioo—or whatever you call him! I don't know what he's going to charge for that letter, but if it's more than three-and-fourpence, I won't pay it!"

"Poor darling!" again said Peggy, stroking Fitz-doodle's fair locks. "What a dreadful expense this thrilling drama has put you to."

Just then the game of cricket was abandoned. The ball *would* keep on knocking down the wickets, and as the sun was still one hundred and one in the shade, the players found it much too hot to keep on putting them up. Dr. Shinbone had joined the group. It was noticed that his face wore an expression of profound gravity. The eminent dentist had recently made a marvellous discovery—"Electricity and steam," he said, "have turned us all into Bohemians."

"Lor'!" exclaimed Mrs. Tol-de-Rolleston; "how awful!"

"Been in Bohemia meself," cried the Irrepressible; "thin bread and butter and souching late as six; suppers—champagne, and all that—after midnight. Awf'ly jolly place, Bohemia."

"O Leo! you're a disgrace to our great and rising colony," exclaimed his wife, much shocked. The Irrepressible feigned to wipe away a tear, and winked at Dr. Shinbone; but the great surgeon cast down his eyes, and murmured something about being as "mad as a hatter."

Mr. Frecklenose now put in an appearance, and the ladies grouped themselves under the shady boughs of a witch elm, while the gentlemen entertained them with lively sallies of wit and cheap repartee. Modern Truth had repaired his rents, and was ready for another century of service.

"Glad you're mended, Materson," said the Irrepressible. "Ladies can see your back without regret, now."

"Sir," said Dr. Shinbone, dryly, "I wonder Mr. Materson can stomach your insolence."

"You're flying from east to west, now, doctor," returned Leo. "Talking about stomachs, did you ever hear tale 'bout Sydney Smith? When doctor told great wit to take walk on an empty stomach, Sydney Smith simply asked, 'Upon whose?' Very funny, dontcherknow."

Mr. Frecklenose smiled wintrily.

"Tales!" again burst forth the Irrepressible. "Tell you heaps of tales! Did you ever hear 'bout Charles Lamb, when a lady said, 'How do you like babies, Mr. Lamb?' Lamb replied (he stuttered, dontcherknow), "B—b—boiled!' Very funny, by Jove!"

What had he said? What had he done? Mr. Frecklenose, in a dead faint, lay prone upon the green sward!

"He knows! He knows!" murmured Fitzdoodle, solemnly, as he gazed sternly upon the prostrate form.

"Eno's be hanged!" exploded the great dentist; "leave him to me!"

When Frecklenose awoke from his swoon, he saw that stern gaze still riveted upon his face, and he moaned, "*'E knows, 'e knows!*"

CHAPTER XXIV.

WANTED, AN ASSASSIN.

THE great Caldron, the most brilliant legal luminary of all the Australias (the acquittal of the innocent Fitzdoodle had made him world-famous) sat upon his eminent chair, with a "silent smile" upon his eminent face. He had received a post-card from O'Brier, and certain reflections, consequent on the perusal thereof, were fomenting in his eminent brain.

"Greatest and most perspicacious of men (ran the post-card), as your forensic nose is now diligently applied to the grindstone of investigation, and as you suppose I know something with regard to the literary motives which actuated the assassin of Oliver Black, and as the exigencies of romance, so far as I am concerned, no longer necessitate my silence, I will clean out the Augean stables of brooding grief and concentrated gloom ——and tell you all! What I shall tell you (when I see you) will make the very hair of your eminent wig to straighten, and grow grey. *I know the murderer!* Meanwhile, I pray you subdue your too expectant nerves. I should recommend a course of quinine and iron, for your very nerve centres will throb and shoot like unto barometric corns.—Yours, "FITZDOODLE.

"P.S.—What a lot you can get on a post-card!"

"Remarkably talented young man,—Fitzdoodle!" muttered Caldron, gazing fondly at the cryptogram, which now hung, framed and glazed, in the lawyer's chamber. "Such a wealth of metaphor, such a classic——"

The lawyer shivered like an aspen leaf as a gentle "purr" broke upon his ear. "D—— that cat, how it did startle me, the brute!" he exclaimed, hurling his ink-stand over his shoulder in the direction whence came the sound. Immediately the lawyer's head was subjected to

the process of "punching," and a flood of misguided English poured upon his tympanum.

"What d'ye mean by it, you crack-brained wig-prop!" purred the man of genius, drying his shirt front with Mr. Caldron's blotting pad. "Don't go makin' no cryptograms on my shirt front with your (qualified) red-hink!"

"*Hinc illæ lachrymæ!*" sighed Mr. Caldron, brushing away a tear—— "Why do you come purring around in that fashion? Hav'nt you a little regard for my felines?"

When Virgil had dried his shirt front, he took a seat upon the lawyer's table and "purred" more pleasantly.

"Well! Cowslip," said Dante, briskly, "anything fresh?"

"Yes; I've been thinking lately about this Wheelbarrow mystery. Since I had that little set-to with Clawby, and proved to him conclusively"—here the Cowslip illustrated his meaning by a violent thrust at the eminent lawyer's abdomen—"proved to him conclusively that he was wrong as regards Fitzdoodle, I've been thinking who I could haul up with any chance of success."

"Well?" said Caldron, writhing.

"Well, I consider that the exigencies of romance will not be thoroughly satisfied until someone is arrested for the murder of Oliver Black, and found guilty. First of all, I thought of you."

"Me?" cried Dante, pale with alarm.

"Yes! you. There's any amount of evidence against you. Didn't you play nap with the deceased at the Dressing-Gown Club that night, and give him an I.O.U. for two and fourpence-halfpenny?"

"Y—e—s," assented Caldron, with chattering teeth.

"Well, it has been clearly shown that some paper of great value to the assassin was taken from the corpse. Now, was you're I.O.U. found upon him?"

"No—o—o, I—I don't think—it-t-t was, n-n-n-ow I c-c-come t-t-t-to think of it."

"Very well, then, there you are!" purred the man of genius, producing a pair of hand-cuffs. The great lawyer fell upon his knees.

"Oh, Cowslip," he cried, the tears streaming from his eyes, "believe me, I am innocent—I am innocent as an unfledged dove. I am—but stop—I can prove an alibi!" A deep blush suffused the countenance of the eminent lawyer.

"Well?"

"Let me whisper it, Cowslip; even walls have ears, and truth is stranger than fiction." Then Caldron whispered——

"Ha! ha! ha! he! he! he!" laughed the two together. The man of genius relented.

Good old alibi!

"Well," continued Virgil, when the laughter had subsided, "I've thought of Mrs. Gabbleton, with her misanthropic tendencies, Mrs. Crackles, the Coroner, Miss Frecklenose, pa Topweight (to whom the corpse owed a small sum for a tripe supper *à domicile*), the foreman of the jury, and finally, I've hit upon an excellent assassin."

"Yes! who's he?"

"Why, Lessland, the aristocrat, Black's friend, and a witness at the trial," exclaimed the man of genius, with a look of ineffable pride.

"Bah!"

"Why, bah?"

"I don't know, Cowslip; but I should say, bah!"

"Wasn't he with the corpse in his last hours? didn't they get drunk together? and surely"—here the light of genius shone resplendent in Cowslip's eyes—"surely if one was drunk enough to get murdered, the other was drunk enough to murder him!"

"O Cowslip," cried the great lawyer, "you are even greater than Clawby! I worship you."

For a moment the thin, tapering form of the man of genius stood statuesque, and a kind of halo of detective glory shone about his noble brow.

"The exigencies of romance require it," he said at last, as Caldron rose from the ground, "and really, Gaborihohooh himself could never have devised a greater triumph of detective skill."

"You are right, Virgil," assented the lawyer.

"By-the-bye, Dante, I shall have to conduct you once

more to the Infernal Regions. Mudlark lieth sick, and would fain have audience with you."

"Susannah Burgess! begad, and the boiled babies! She wants to tell me about Susannah!"

"When shall I call, Dante?"

"At eight, Virgil. The clouds, indeed, do thicken, but there shall be light at last!"

CHAPTER XXV.

DEATH OF THE GREAT MAGICIENNE.

VIRGIL stepped into Dante's office at the appointed hour, and found the man of gloom eager to plunge once more into the Infernal Regions. The great *magicienne* was on her death-bed, and as Caldron thought she knew something about the Boiled Baby business, he was anxious to hear what confessions might spring from the dying woman's lips.

When they reached the Hall of Magic, and entered the dark passage, the rodents who had caused the lawyer's downfall on two previous occasions set up a squeak of delight and prepared for fun. Mr. Caldron, however, only once slipped through to the basement, taking with him a considerable quantity of lath and plaster, so that the rats, on the whole, were dissatisfied, and vented their spite on the *Vade Mecum*, left by the lawyer on his second visit. The lawyer found the fairy-like child pale, and weary, and worn with grief, at the approaching death of her beloved *Madre*.

Another girl of tender years, wearing upon her face the traces of recent tears, stood in the room—that sacred home of mystical research and spiritual culture.

The great magicienne, then, lay upon her death-bed. Her strongly-marked, intellectual features were pale and emaciated, and in her eyes there shone a spirituous light. The bottle of Schnapps and the beautiful broken cup, those two graceful vessels—wrought by some unknown artist, who had informed them with his spirit—lay beside her on the bed, and the frequent fluttering of the wan, trembling hand towards those tasteful objects of plastic art, showed how fondly the mother had cherished them. She raised the broken cup to her lips, and fervently kissed its brim, as though bidding a last, long farewell to a beloved friend. The homely little bed was still but

scantily supplied with linen, which closely resembled, in its colour, the dingy yellow tresses of the dying sorceress. A flood of hot tears burst from Caldron's eyes—perhaps the first he had shed since his happy school-boy days, when the quick birch was wont to stir the torpid mind. The sad thought of it flashed through his brain, and instinctively his hand wandered to the point of contact. Even the man of genius could not restrain his tears, and ever and anon he dried his eye and nose with imaginary cambric.

At Madame Mudlark's request, the two girls, with a tearful smile, left the bedside. They might go, said the dying woman, elsewhere; so they withdrew to the darkest corner of the chamber, and then—transient are the tears of youth as the gentle showers that sparkle in April sunlight—they put out their little tongues at the dear mother, who again raised the cup to her lips and smiled, as though in communion with beloved spirits.

"Ah! *mes cher amis*," she began, in a strange, unearthly voice, that sounded almost angelic in the small, hushed room, "blarst you."

Caldron's tears flowed fast—"You expressed a desire to see me, sweet mother, ere you left us for another sphere?" he said, with a tender, compassionate smile.

"Yes, blarst you—that is, are you a divine? I need no spiritual succour, cuss you!" and again she kissed the cup. "For years—alas! how they have flown, cuss 'em—my soul has been chastened by spiritual thought and silent prayer, and I want no bloomin', blazin' parsons to guide me in my last hours of mortal agony, blow it!"

The man of genius sobbed aloud.

"Chuck out them whelps—bless them," she said, tenderly. The two sweet children rose, and hand in hand, without a murmur, they left the sick room; only turning upon the threshold, when they placed their tiny thumbs upon their tender, rosy noses—"tip tilted like the petals of a flower"—and spreading out their little fingers, bid the sweet mother a silent adieu.

"I can't stand—Boohoo—much more of this, Cowslip," cried the great lawyer, wringing his handkerchief. The man of genius wrung his hand.

"*Mon ami*," continued the sorceress, in a low voice,

"you are a great lawyer, blarst and cuss you, knowing the dark ways of social life, walking as a beast of prey in this vile valley of tears, and death, and misery, cuss you, I have brought you hither in order to confide to you a mighty secret about my daughter."

"Are you Susannah Burgess's mother?" asked the lawyer in surprise.

"I am, *caro mio*, blarst you," replied the moribund with a pathetic smile, and she again kissed the cup.

"My sweet daughter, now departed to a certain place, was passing beautiful in the tender grace of girlhood—as I was once, when in the proud courts of ancient Europe I' ad a bloomin', blazin' fine time of it. But she, *ma fille chérie, ange du paradis*, took on with swells, blarst 'em, and left me with such solace in my dread loneliness as my poor learning could supply, took on with swells, and amongst them came that bloomin' blazin' humbug, Frank Frecklenose, blarst and cuss him!"

"Heavens!" "'Eavins!" cried the lawyer and the man of genius in a breath.

The beloved *Madre* fell back exhausted on her pillow, and the sweet children, hand in hand, came back into the room, like two fair angels waiting to bear away the pure stainless soul.

"Has the end come," whispered the lawyer.

"No," murmured the dying lady, with a seraphic look, "no, blarst and cuss you!" Then, after a painful silence, she began, "She saw him *boil it, boil it* in a cauldron."

"Ah!" the two men listened in breathless suspense. "Boiled what, sweet mother?" whispered Caldron, drawing near.

"Give me gold, and I will tell you, gold! gold! *He* gave me gold to save himself from ignominious shame and death! Gold! gold! see here!" and the dying lady tore open the mattress and the pillow. Gold! gold! it streamed upon the floor. She burst open the bed-posts—gold! gold! She struck the table with her cherished bottle, and out of it rolled gold! gold! She pulled a string hanging at the bedside, and down from the ceiling showered gold! gold! Gold poured from her yellow hair—gold came oozing up through the floor-boards—leaking from the walls. It streamed in shining

ever-clinking masses everywhere—gold! gold! its gathering torrent burying the feet of the two men. Gold! gold! A Niagara of gold—an ocean of glittering gold—up to their knees! everywhere gold! gold! "Away! away!" cried the lawyer, "we shall be buried in gold." They turned and fled, the two angelic children had disappeared; and, upon the surface of the ever-growing torrent there was an eddying movement, like that produced by a drowning creature in her last struggles. Then came a cry, stifled and low and strange, amid the clinking of the ever-gathering gold. "Gold! gold! blarst and cuss you!"

Mother Mudlark was no more.

"A terrible sight," whispered Caldron, watching the growing glory of that golden sea!

"Yes, Dante, it was indeed!" returned the man of genius, as he borrowed a half-sovereign from the ocean of gold.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE NEW CUSTOMER.

If it be true that "Truth is stranger than Fiction"—and this immortal drama hath established it without a doubt—it is equally true that "Procrastination is the Thief of Time." Fitzdoodle, though plunged once more into the vortex of Melbourne life, reflected sagely, in his leisure moments, upon the golden precept just enunciated; yet he was loth to make his promised confession to the inquisitive Caldron, who daily sat knawing the nails of expectancy in his eminent chamber. "Why," mused O'Brier, "why should I write *finis* to the remarkable romance in which the exigencies of Australian literature have cast me to play so grand and noble a *rôle*. Such indeed would be the inevitable result of a too hasty confession, so Caldron had better sit and whistle during another chapter or two!"

"Procrastination is the Thief of Time!" Fitzdoodle's thoughts wandered back to the copy-books of his youth, in whose pages this great truth had been inscribed with painful repetition and blots *ad infinitum*. Happy days, he thought, when literary patriotism had no meaning to his embryo mind; when the sweet pain of yearning love troubled him not; when no boiled babies fed on his damask cheek; when no ghastly vision of the gallows disturbed his sleep; when brain and stomach were practically one and indivisible, when the development of the one was encouraged by the *Argumentum ad Bircham*, and the transient pains of the other were gently dispelled by the *Argumentum ad Beecham*. Happy days of youth! *Où sont les neiges d'antan!*

Fitzdoodle's mind was made up at last. The fair Peggy should no longer languish in the beery embrace of the "Kilted Opossum." Were "Cook's Tours" invented for nothing? No! He would marry Peggy at once, and

hand-in-hand, and heart to heart, they would leave the land of the golden fleece, and boiled black babies, and vehicular mysteries,—never more to set foot upon its shores.

"Wich I'm glad to see you in the land of the livin', Mr. Fitzdoodle," said Mrs. Crackles, with an emotional crick interrupting the sombre reveries of her lodger, "wich its thanks to my hevidence that yer neck didn't——" Crick!

"Mrs. Crackles, I wish you'd get your 'cricking' apparatus attended to, its getting rustier, and louder, and more frequent than ever; and after all the confounded worry I've had, my nerves won't stand it. I don't want to be unkind, but—it always reminds me of a baby's rattle. If you had suffered as I have from boiled babies you would appreciate my feelings."

"Elas! Sir," cricked Mrs. Crackles, dissolving into gutta-percha-like tears, "wich indeed I 'ave suffered from 'em too (crick!) which my god-mother's sister's 'usband's step-sister's first when teethin' disappeared all of a sudden (crick!) an' nobody never knewed nothing about it till (crick!) I finds a teethin' ring in the *pot-o-foo*, as the French cook called it, namin' the dish (crick!) after the 'usband of the lady in the bible as wasn't partic'lar about 'er morals, wich I felt that sick (crick!) as I've never spoke French since!"

Mrs. Crackles's experiences were cut short by the arrival of a postman, who came laden with a post-card for Mr. Fitzdoodle, which informed the latter that Peggy had returned to town, had resumed her duties at the "Kilted Opossum," and would be pleased to see Mr. Fitzdoodle as soon as Mr. Fitzdoodle could make it convenient to himself to call.

During the perusal of his lady's missive, O'Brier's brow had wrinkled angerly. He rose and paced his room, and the "boiled" expression re-appeared upon his face.

"He has brass," he murmured, "illimitable brass—and his daughter is charming, and, sooth to say, I have gone perhaps too far to recede. Now, if the old beggar would only make up his mind to 'snuff it.'—'Snuff it!' the very words that call me back to my sole self! O why, O why did he boil 'em!"

Ere long, Fitzdoodle had regained his customary composure, and sauntered forth in the cool of the evening towards the "Kilted Opossum," musing, as he went, on the great lesson Australian fiction had taught him—"Truth is stranger than Fiction." He became, at last, so buried in thought that his footsteps led him accidentally into divers strange places, principally bars, and his brow wrinkled angerly as each time he was compelled, for the sake of appearances, to ask for "something short." Whilst in one of these places, his attention was attracted by a shabby, uncouth figure slinking away into a corner. Had Mr. O'Brier's eyes been agreed as to the necessity of perfect singleness of focus they would have recognised the form and features of an old friend. As it was, a full binocular stare revealed nothing but a hazy duality of shape, so Fitzdoodle closed an eye experimentally; then a vague recollection of somebody seen before slowly impressed itself upon his consciousness. So lost was he in the contemplation of the strange figure, that he scarcely realised that it was moving stealthily towards him, until he felt a rusty pair of handcuffs slipped upon his wrists.

"Wha'sh matter now?" cried Mr. O'Brier; "more mysterish? more exigensh? Not if I know it, m'boy! I've had 'nough of sh' exig'nshies of romansh."

But the stranger persisted. "I am an experienced detective of twenty years' standing," he cried. "I'm Mr. Clawby—the great Clawby—the renowned Clawby, who arrested Fitzdoodle O'Brier—the great detective whose name is writ large upon the glorious roll of Fame!"

Alas! the splendid disguises of the great detective, where were they now? A nondescript agglomeration of rags and tatters, remains of former disguises, now covered his manly form; and his nose, that he once likened to the ferret's, was swollen and magnificently adorned by a natural disguise of "grog-blossoms."

"Since O'Brier's escape," continued Clawby, in a husky voice,—"an escape due solely to misguided judicial opinion—I have made seven hundred and forty-seven arrests; but at last the assassin has fallen a prey to my detective skill! Follow me!"

"Takemoff!" cried Fitzdoodle, terrified. "Takemoff! 'Minnoshent as boiled baby! M'namsh Fitzdoodle

'Brier; had 'nough of d——d wheel-barrow mystery. Takemoff, Clawby!"

"Fitzdoodle O'Brier!" exclaimed the great detective, "foiled! foiled again! alas! shall I never run some murderer to earth? shall I be at last compelled to arrest the ignominious Cowslip?"

Slowly the famous detective liberated his prisoner, and Fitzdoodle hurriedly quitted the bar. Looking back, he saw the rusty handcuffs slipped upon the wrists of a new comer, and the light of triumph gleaming once more in Clawby's eyes.

Mr. Fitzdoodle struggled diligently in the direction of the "Kilted Opossum," turning neither to the left nor to the right. His encounter with Clawby had had the beneficial effect of bracing up his excited nerves, so that by the time he reached the shrine of 'Frecklenose's Special,' and Peggy, his brain functioned with tolerable lucidity.

"O Fitz, how pale you are!" were Peggy's first words, "what have you been doing?"

"Nothing, dearest, nothing,—been studying the Mystery of Bathing Machine—Emerson, you know, awfully thrilling!"

"Poor darling! you'll kill yourself with over study.—The usual tap, dear?"

"Yes, love."

The arrival of a customer put an end to the lover's confidences which had just commenced. The stranger was a tall fresh complexioned young man with straw coloured moustache and curly hair.

"How like you, dearest," whispered Peggy to her lover, "same height and build—and quite fair, just like you, dear, *so* handsome, too."

"Is the boss at home?" asked the stranger, with a consequential air.

"Yes, Sir, he'll be here in a moment," answered Peggy, smiling. She thought the costume (a large check pattern) worn by the stranger, gave him quite an aristocratic appearance.

"Glad to see you out of quod," said the new comer, turning to Fitzdoodle. "Been in quod myself;—one touch of nature makes the whole world kin, don't you know."

Fitzdoodle was spared the angry reply that rose to his lips, by the opportune appearance of Mr. Frecklenose. Then a strange thing happened (quite as strange as anything that ever came to pass in the tombs of Kôr): the landlord of the "Kilted Opossum" advanced towards the stranger, looked him steadily in the face for a moment, turned ashy pale, and, with a deep groan, fled, with more precipitancy than grace, into the back parlour.

"That won't do for me," the stranger called out in a loud voice, "I've got a little matter to square with you. *They* ain't done *boiling* yet!"

"Boiling!" cried Peggy and Fitzdoodle in a breath. "What can he mean?" The stranger without a word sprang lightly over the bar, entered the parlour, and remained closeted with the landlord for the rest of the evening. When at last he rose to take his leave "Frecklenose's special" had wrought strange havoc in his brain. Passing unsteadily through the bar, he held Mr. Frecklenose affectionately by the arm—"Babish! boiled or baked!" he cried. "All hot! All hot! Babish! Babish!"

Then pale with fright at the changed aspect of her father, Peggy hastily produced her cushion of tribulation and fainted away. She had recognised Podger Lessland, the corpse's bosom friend.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"THE HEART BOWED DOWN."

FITZDOODLE *did* ultimately get home. But his dreams that night were unaccountably spectral. A gibbering steaming-hot black baby disturbed his first sleep by squatting *à cheval* upon his chest and giving a gloomy recitation of "Eugene Aram." "Two ragged blows with a jagged stick, and then the deed was done!" The boiled reciter got quite Irvingesque over this passage, and Fitzdoodle was obliged to dispel the vision with a boot. Next, pa Frecklenose, Lessland, and Peggy, sat upon his bed and devoured with great gusto several ebon infants that squealed and writhed with delight upon the forks of the cannibalistic trio, who discoursed in stage whispers on certain points of Malthusian philosophy. Fitzdoodle hurled his night-cap in their midst and the group vanished. But boiled black babies soon trooped in shoals about the room; performed gymnastic feats upon the bedstead rails; sang pæans to his indispensables; chased each other over the pillow; boiled black Queen Mabs; took short swallow flights on wings of knives and forks; and boiled one of their number in the washhand basin. So Fitzdoodle rose and smote that visionary liliputian army hip and thigh, and awoke with a start to find himself standing slipper in hand in the middle of his bed-chamber, and the cold drops of perspiration standing on his angerly-wrinkled brow.

When Mrs. Crackles, at the breakfast hour, served up two succulent "black-puddings," Mr. O'Brier waxed more wroth than ever, and flung them and certain variegated specimens of English at his landlady's hapless head.

Fitzdoodle groaned in spirit. "If everybody knew," he muttered, with tears gathering in his eyes, "if they only knew what it is to be the hero of a shilling shocker, they would never, never read another."

"Wich it's like my aunt's grandmother on the father's

side as wrote a hortobiogravy, wich she was so mauled by the crickets as she changed her name and died in the horspital."

Another post card from Peggy put an end to this dismal colloquy. It ran :—

"Dere Fitz,

"I don't know what's the matter with pa, but he's evidently gone rong in 'is upper story. He's put on a four-ale insted of Irish, and ritten to the brewers for five hogsheads of banburys. Now he's in the back parler riting 'is memores, he says. Do come and see the old loonatic, dere. I'm getting quite angshus. Mr. Lessland's been here again, he won't pay for his drinks, and says he'll see pa *boiled* first.—Your own "PEGGY."

× × ×

"Bother the old fossil," was Fitzdoodle's impatient comment on this piece of news. "Writing his memoirs, by Jove! Another mystery to swell the *glories* of Australian literature. Alas! poor Peggy! poor Peggy! when she knows all! I wonder whether the confounded old imbecile means to finish the whole wheel-barrow business by a public confession!"

Mr. Fitzdoodle remained at home all day in order to settle that moot point in his mind, since he thought the exigencies of Australian romance required it.

After an exciting game of draughts with his landlady, resulting in a signal victory for Mrs. Crackles, Fitzdoodle retired to rest, forgot the dread visions of the previous night, and awoke the next morning ready for any emergency.

Any emergency took the shape of Mr. Caldron, who arrived at breakfast time.

Gentle reader, it is usual in Australia, when two men meet to discuss some matter of life or death—when some *great calamity hangs over their heads*, when dreadful secrets seer their throbbing hearts—it is usual to open the conversation somewhat in the following manner:—

"Hallo! old chappie. What have you got for breakfast? Piece of bacon only! Humph! Now,—this is a matter of vital importance—do you like your bacon fat or lean?"

"Well, dear boy, I must refer you to 'Balzac's remark anent the same.' The matter is of some importance, I admit. Horace's love of bacon is well known—don't be afraid, dear boy, I'm not going to quote him!"

"*Wee, wee;* certainly, certainly; but don't you think, now, that a cabbage, from the point of view of scientific cookery, is highly adaptable as a relish at the matutinal meal?"

"I must refer you to Gaberorio, who said——" and so on. These introductory conversations are not only wonderfully realistic, but they have another advantage—they meet the requirements of Australian romance by filling up *les chapitres chètifs.*

"Well," said the eminent lawyer, after the usual prelude had been gone through, "there's a trifling point in the wheel-barrow business which, it seems, you are in a position to clear up. You know the murderer, you say. Now, if Madame Mudlark knew anything about a certain paper relating to boiled babies, I think I know the secret already. Cowslip and I have found an excellent assassin, to whom that paper might have been of value; so, there you are."

"What did Madame Mudlark tell you?" asked Fitz-doodle, in alarm.

"She told me she was Susannah's mother—or supposed she was. She made a thrilling death-bed confession——"

"Is she dead, then?"

"As nits," replied the eminent lawyer, wiping away a tear. "She died with Christian fortitude; the gentle, penitent utterances of the great magicienne still ring in my ears. She confessed that Susannah Burgess, in her early days, had strayed from the paths of virtue, and that Frank Frecklenose was the shepherd swain whose amorous pipe had lured her into the Arcady of naughty ways."

"Oh, Caldron, you, too, are a poet; let me shake you by the hand. But didn't you tell me once that you had lived in Arcadia, and called it a 'lotus-eating paradise?'"

The great lawyer blushed. "Well, ye—es; but then Arcadia's been changed since Frecklenose's time. They never boiled black babies in my Arcadia."

"Then you know all?—how Susannah, when on a visit to Frecklenose's station, found, to her horror, that he was

in the habit of boiling down black babies for the manufacture of a certain compound of which he held the recipe; how that recipe fell into her hands, and, ultimately, came into Black's possession. Was the possession of *that* paper, do you think, the motive of the wheel-barrow crime? Don't you see now that nobody but that old baby-boiler could have killed Black? and that that recipe was taken from the corpse on the night of the murder?"

The eminent lawyer put his right hand to his eminent brow. "There seems to be a certain plausibility in your hypothesis, but, really, my brain is so disturbed, that I shall have to return to my chambers in order to work it all out on a bit of paper."

"And that's the reason," continued Fitzdoodle, excitedly, "that's the reason why the hunks wanted my Peggy to marry the corpse."

Caldron was endeavouring to work it out on his shirt-cuff by rule of three.

"Now, do you understand why I complied so unflinchingly up to a certain point, with the exigencies of——"

"O d——n the exigencies, just wait a minute please. I shall have to resort to the Algebra after all."

"Wich 'ere's another post card," said Mr. Crackles, entering the room, and handing the missive to Fitzdoodle. "What a deal of expense you do put your young woman to." Crick!

Fitzdoodle snatched the post card and read it hastily. Then a strange thing happened. He swore! Then he rose to his feet, went thro' a *bizarre* kind of war dance, and handed the post card to the great lawyer. Then a stranger thing happened. He laughed! and rising to his feet, he took Fitzdoodle by the hand, and together they performed a brilliant hornpipe. When the dance was over, the two men spoke.

"Well I'm blessed!" said Fitzdoodle.

"Well I'm blowed!" exclaimed the eminent barrister.

Frank Frecklenose, the post card informed them, was no more!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LITERARY EFFORTS.

THE gods "enthroned on high Olympus," if we are to believe the "old Greek" (whoever he may be) had a very amusing pastime. They employed an old party named Nemesis, a daughter of Nox (not John Knox), and a most obnoxious old lady withal, to play practical jokes upon erring mankind. A poor mortal could not commit the most trifling misdeed without being subjected to the interference of this old beldame. If he only jumped upon his mother, out of mere exuberance of spirits,—if he simply passed a pleasant half-hour disfiguring his wife with a homely poker,—if he playfully sat his first-born upon the kitchen fire, and smoked a tranquil pipe whilst listening to the sweet music of his infant's voice,—the old lady employed by the gods was sure to punish this waste of time by some means or other, and her Olympian employers would crack their sides with laughter at the tortures she invented. Good old Nemesis! At last she grew tired of hoaxing mankind, and turned her attention to the immortals themselves. She put on her spectacles, went quietly through her Lempriere, and took notes. She got up a list of indictable offences, that would have made a circuit judge turn pale. Then she had a fine time of it! Fortunately the newspapers of Olympus are not now extant, but we may reasonably suppose that most of the cases got up by the revengeful old lady were tried *in camera*, although they might compare favourably with some of the law reports which appear in the enlightened press of the Nineteenth Century.

The gods banished from Olympus, and the daughter of Nox superannuated, mortals fashioned a new deity called Fate, and, according to an Australian philosopher, they elected George Eliot as her prophetess, who seems to have exhausted all her genius in endeavouring to

inculcate the religion of fate in the stubborn mind of Frank Frecklenose. There can be no doubt that in his early colonial life the landlord of the "Kilted Opossum" had been no better than he should have been; and that Nemesis had made copious notes of his iniquities.

Pa Topweight, if he had been questioned, would have winked and chuckled over his early conquests and those of his friend Frecklenose. "*Tu m'as pris Toto, je t'ai pris Tata,*" he might have said, had he been acquainted with "Froufrou." But did he know what terrible secret Susannah Burgess had become possessed of? Did he dream, that his friend's honour, his life even, was in the hands of the lady whose *pointes* and *entrechats* had dimpled his heart with their fairy-like imprints? Susannah Burgess, he had heard, had made a fool of Frecklenose, and eloped with a neighbouring squatter; that she had gone to England, and was not likely to trouble the Australian novelist with a recital of her woes.

Little did Frecklenose know the exigencies of Victorian romance! Little did he reckon that the powerful pen of the master of fiction could, if necessary, resuscitate the dead, much less bring back to Australian shores, a poor erring ballet-girl, possessed of the means of making a little honest hush-money. Pure and spotless had he been since his bachelor days; happy in the possession of a wife of meek and obliging nature—obliging enough, even, to quit the pages of romance at the proper moment; happy in the possession of a daughter who held proud sway over the susceptible hearts of the *habitués* of the "Kilted Opossum." What then must have been his horror when Oliver Black, in league with Susannah Burgess, landed in Melbourne, and claimed first of all large quantities of "oof" and finally the hand of his daughter Peggy. He was a high-souled public man, and had submitted to these extortions up to a certain point, but the till of the "Kilted Opossum" had suddenly taken to fits of depression, and Oliver Black, in spite of all risks, was anathematised, and the heroic Fitzdoodle installed in his place.

With Black's murder the black baby nightmare seemed to the happy Frecklenose to have been dispelled for ever, —but no! again the fateful secret found a reliquary

in the bosom of Podger Lessland—what could he do? Podger Lessland, springing upon him unawares; brandishing the boiled black babies in his face at every moment—calling for "Scotch whisky hot—*boiling* hot." Commenting upon the heat of the weather—"*boiling* hot day, boss, ain't it?"—would give him no peace. What could he do? Poison Lessland! and then? The accursed paper might fall into the hands of some other miscreant, and he, the spotless landlord of the "Kilted Opossum," the publican who never baptised his beer or simplified his spirits (more than was absolutely necessary), would perhaps be held up to scorn as a—something dreadful, indeed, to think of! What could he do! Should he press his unwelcome customer to take more spirits than was good for the soul, in the hope that he might get run over or fall down an area? Should he lay wait for him at the street corner and——No!

A happy thought at last whirred across his agitated brain. He would write his Memoirs;" he would call them—what? The "Confessions of a Baby-Boiler?" Something in De Quincey's style, with a touch of Gabbroiriou, and a barely-perceptible spice of James Payn.

So all day Frank Frecklenose sat in the back parlour and wrote; thinking now and then that Australia, in her admiration for his literary genius, might forget his many sins. His mind travelled back to the happy days of youth, when "glass alleys" and modest "mivvys" occupied his daily thoughts and his capacious pockets; when, seated in the gloomy pew at church, his little fingers would compute his hidden wealth, and suddenly some emancipated "mivvy" would clatter upon the tiled floor, and roll to rest along the clanging aisle; when the beadle's form became apparent in the "dim religious light," and ejection from the sacred edifice was effected by that awful authority with "spurnings *à posteriori* not to be named;" he thought of his *début* in the world of commerce and the clanging mart, when, glued to his little stool in the high capacity of office-boy, his young genius displayed itself in grotesque portraiture upon his blotting-pad; he remembered his young ambition to "see the world" and mix with penny-dreadful Red Indians in distant climes; he thought of his flight to Australia, of

his early successes, his Cattle Wash (alas !), his Chicken Raiser, his ever-increasing wealth; then his mind wandered to the wild reckless life of his early Melbourne days, when, with associates wild and reckless as himself, he sowed his "uncultivated cereals" and played "Old Harry." He dreamed of his youthful conquests, his *liaison* with Susannah Burgess, her faithlessness and her flight with a neighbouring squatter, after the horrible discovery they had made. One by one, these incidents were subjected to mental analysis, and set down with self-accusing accuracy and painful spelling upon the bill-heads of the "Kilted Opossum." Once or twice his autobiographical efforts were interrupted by a summons from Peggy to attend to refractory customers, or to remedy the emptiness of hydraulic beer-tubes; but these little matters effected, the "Confessions" were proceeded with in calm seclusion, and with the solemn dignity of conscious literary power.

At last the task was completed, and Frecklenose, as he pinned together the loose sheets and locked them up in his bureau, emitted several sighs of relief and called for "a drop of the usual."

"What have you been scribbling all day, pa?" asked Peggy, when she had brought him the needful refreshment. "Anyone would think you were writing another Mystery."

"So I have, my girl; a short work in De Quincey's manner. Has that scoundrel Lessland been in?" he added, anxiously.

"Not yet, pa. But I think he'll be in shortly—he said yesterday he was in urgent need of 'brass.' O pa, tell me why I'm to serve him with drinks and cigars for nothing; tell me why you give him money out of the till?"

"Oh, he was a friend of Black's, you see, and I'm under a trifling obligation. Mere peculinary matter; don't distress yourself."

Mr. Frecklenose, proudly conscious of a great literary achievement, was in the gayest of moods at dinner-table. He cracked a joke with every mouthful, and washed it down with a copious draught. Only once, when Peggy made an innocent comment on the potatoes (which she said had been "boiled to death"), did the "wintry smile" gather gloomily on her father's brow. No wonder,

then, that Mr. Frecklenose should have felt it incumbent upon him to retire early to bed and rest his wearied brain.

"Goori', Peggy, m'love," said he, "think of y'r old fatjer famoush as De Quinshey. 'C'nfesslions of Baby-Boiler'—'mmortal work by Fran' Fre'l'noge! Goori', dearsh!"

"What can he mean?" muttered Peggy, in alarm. "I do believe pa's going 'dotty.' I must write to Fitz again."

It was still too early to close the hospitable doors of the "Kilted Opossum," so Peggy remained in the bar. Sweet Hebe, moreover, was expecting her Fitzdoodelian god; but solitude was too irksome to her sweet, ingenious mind, so she summoned the founder of the Rawkinites to come and keep her company.

Polly Rawkins appeared, laden with a ponderous tome. Under Peggy's tuition, and by dint of close study of the master-pieces of Australian fiction, her English was rapidly becoming spotlessly pure. Her brow was contracted with deep thought as she stood before her young mistress.

"What's the matter, Polly?" asked Peggy. "Something you don't quite understand?"

"Yes, miss. I've just come across this sentence: '*If man is a gregarious animal, how much more, then, is a woman?*' As the humble founder of a religious sex, I should say the meaning of that sentence is obscure."

"Very obscure, dear; leave it with me, dear; I'll ask Fitz, he's so clever at conundrums."

"Yes; but the writer goes on to say: '*This is not a conundrum, but a simple truth.*'"

"Well, I can only ask Fitz about it, dear; I can't do any more."

The bar of the "Kilted Opossum" being deserted, the two girls talked on about the "curiosities of Victorian literature," when a flickering ray of light from the parlour attracted their attention. Peggy glanced hastily into the room. To her astonishment, she saw the tall figure of her father arrayed in nightcap and gown. He unlocked his bureau and took therefrom sundry documents of portentous size, amongst which were those closely-written sheets that had resulted from the labours of the day.

"As the founder of a religious sex, I should say he might have put on his dressing-gown," said Peggy, with a blush. "Look at his legs, dear! Like matches!"

The girls recoiled, terrified at the aspect of the sleep-walker—for Frecklenose was obviously in a trance. He advanced unsteadily into the bar, holding in his right hand the precious papers, and in his left the guttering candle. Suddenly he dropped the candlestick, and, bending down, lifted up the trap-door leading to the cellar.

"Peggy," he cried, in a strange voice, "your pa, now famoush inge annals of 'Stralian literashure,' dejires t'live no more. The grave now opensh at's feet! g'exigensh' of romansh satishfied, Peggy. Here'sh "Leash of 'Kilted Opossum.' 'Balan' sheet to end larsh year,' 'Recipe' and my 'Confesshons of Baby-Boiler.' Jorig'nal rechipee stol'n from corpsh of Oliver Black, murdered for jat purpoge."

The awful truth flashed upon poor Peggy. "Boiled Babies—Recipe—Oliver Black—O, pa! O pa!" and with a piercing shriek she fell prone upon the floor. Frecklenose awoke with a start. He staggered forward with a look of terror, putting out his hands as though repulsing some frightful visionary shape—another step, and Frank Frecklenose fell headlong down the cellar steps, into an open barrel. His thin legs wobbled feebly for a second or two, then all was still. Frank Frecklenose had ceased to breathe!

CHAPTER XXIX.

MALT EXTRACT.

WHEN their first paroxysm of grief had subsided, the eminent lawyer and Fitzdoodle together left the lodgings of the latter, and hurried away to the "Kilted Opossum." On their arrival at that noted brewery, they found that a revolution had been brewing. The founder of the Rawkinites had undertaken the onerous responsibility of directing the affairs of the "Kilted Opossum," much to the disgust of that animal's other servants. On the previous evening, after Peggy had been put to bed, the entire *personnel* of the "Kilted Opossum" descended to the cellar, in order, if possible, to extract the landlord from his own malt liquor. The staff consisted of Polly Rawkins, a kitchen-maid, and a very small scullion. The plan of operations drawn up by Polly did not meet the views of the two servants. She had ordered the kitchen-maid to insinuate herself into the cask, which was to be previously emptied through the tap, and endeavour to oust the corpse from its inelegant position, while the scullion aided in the process by tugging at the projecting legs. The scullion refused point-blank to have anything to do with it; he didn't even know whether the governor was dead, he said, and would rather not trifle with those powerful extremities, whose strength had been so often tried upon his tender form. As to the kitchen-maid, she said that Polly might do the job herself; she had been engaged as kitchen-maid, and wasn't going to do no cellar-work for nobody! ' So papa Frecklenose was allowed to remain during the night *in status quo ante.* In the morning, discussion was still rife as to the best means of reclaiming the deceased from the lower regions. Polly Rawkins herself flatly declined to enter the cask with the object of shifting the deceased. As the founder of a "religious sex," she could never dream of it. Suddenly a

brilliant idea struck the microscopic intellect of the scullion. "If," he said, "you just leave the trap open, an' tie a clothes-line round 'is feet, we can pull 'im up into the shop, without losing none o' his beer."

This operation was unanimously agreed upon, and commenced forthwith; and just as Fitzdoodle and his eminent friend entered the bar, the late landlord, swaying to and fro in mid-air, presented a very gruesome spectacle indeed.

"What *are* you doing?" cried the two gentlemen, almost in a breath.

"We're a-hauling up the boss, sir," said the scullion. "He's fell in the six-ale, sir."

"Dreadful! awful!" cried the two men, aghast.

"Yus, sir, ain't it? He might 'a' chose the four-ale or the porter—'twouldn't make much difference in the flavour, sir."

"How dare you?—irreverent young ape!" cried Caldron, greatly shocked.

No sooner was this angry outburst over than a mighty splash was heard. The scullion, in fact, terrified by the lawyer's menacing attitude, had relaxed his hold of the rope, and the late Mr. Frecklenose was once more precipitated into his bier. By their more muscular efforts, Fitzdoodle and the lawyer ultimately extracted the defunct Frecklenose from his undignified position, and laid him upon his bed.

"Where's Peggy?" inquired her anxious lover, when the rescue was at last effected.

"Took bad, sir, and in bed," answered the founder of religions. "Dr. Shinbone is with her now."

"Murderous old crackjaw!" exclaimed Fitzdoodle; "he'll go pulling out all her teeth, or something of that sort, if he's left long with her."

Dr. Shinbone, however, shortly made his appearance. He looked grave, professionally grave—a sure sign that the case was not a hopeless one.

"Very ill, indeed," he said, in answer to Fitzdoodle's eager inquiry; "completely demented, sir; won't be able to serve in the bar for several weeks. Should recommend the removal of several large molars; very serious case, indeed, sir."

"How is it old Frecklenose pegged out so suddenly?" asked Caldron.

"From what I can gather from this young woman," the doctor pointed to Polly Rawkins, "I imagine he was under the impression that his demise was a matter of necessity. He was, it appears, desirous of complying with certain requirements of dramatic——"

"O, you mean the exigencies!" cried Fitzdoodle and Caldron together.

The eminent surgeon-dentist pursed his lips professionally. "Yes, exactly, that was my idea of the case. I have known several cases of a similar nature, though I must confess that the timely extraction of an incisor or two would in most instances have removed all risk of immediate death. Let me feel your pulse, sir," added the doctor, turning to Caldron. "M'yes, your constitution is liable at any moment to sudden disintegration, and I should strongly advise you to attend at my dispensary to-morrow morning, when I shall be pleased to remove the necessary quantity of molars and incisors at the rate of one shilling and sixpence per tooth, sir—one shilling and sixpence per tooth."

The great lawyer trembled from head to foot. "Thank you, doctor; I—I—I'll think about it."

When Dr. Shinbone had taken his departure, Polly Rawkins was cross-questioned as to the occurrences of the previous night.

"What was it that frightened Miss Frecklenose, Polly?" asked Caldron.

"Well, as the founder of a religious sex, I should aver (as Haddison or Hume would say) that the scanty costume worn by the old party was enough to frighten any modest young woman into fits."

"But Peggy's a very strong-minded young lady. It would take more than *that* to disturb her equanimity," said Caldron.

"Well, if he'd only had a divided skirt on like mine, it wouldn't have been so alarming. But he had some papers in his hand——"

The two men, startled, looked at each other.

"I found 'em in the cellar this morning—here they are." The Rawkinites handed to Caldron the lease of

the "Kilted Opossum," a paper marked "The Recipe," and a sealed envelope, upon which was scrawled, in Frecklenose's handwriting, "The Confesshons of a Baby-Boiler."

Fitzdoodle uttered a cry.

"I wonder whether he intended his executors to publish it," he said, gloomily. "At any rate, it would put an end to all this wheel-barrow business."

"It's very annoying, indeed," returned the eminent lawyer. "Cowslip and I had got up a first-class case against Podger Lessland. But strange, indeed," he added, solemnly, "bizarre in the extreme, are exigencies of romance! We will read the confession to a syndicate of publishers, and see what can be done with a view to its publication in a popular form. Australia has found her De Quincey! She may, one day, even discover her Gaberaboreau!"

"What are we to do now?" asked Fitzdoodle, impatiently.

"I am, of course, one of the executors, conjointly with Dr. Shinbone and yourself; we must overhaul the private papers of the defunct, and then, and then—we'll invite Dr. Shinbone and the Cowslip to my chamber, and have a little amusement with old Frecklenose's confession."

"Why Cowslip?" asked O'Brier, with some surprise.

"Can't you see that my arrangement with Cowslip, to arrest Podger Lessland right off the reel, must fall through? And can't you understand that he'll want to know the reason why?"

"Well, I s'pose you're right, eminent," said Fitzdoodle hesitatingly; "but you didn't stretch a point when *I* was arrested on the same charge. You may depend upon it, Lessland knows something about those confounded boiled babies, and if we don't settle it somehow, we may have to run into another volume!"

"Heav'n forbid!" cried the great barrister, fervently.

CHAPTER XXX.

DR. SHINBONE'S PERSUASIVE POWERS.

WHEN Dr. Shinbone arrived at the chambers of the illustrious barrister, he was surprised to find that luminary in colloquy with Fitzdoodle O'Brier. He had come prepared to scale the teeth and cut the corns of the eminent, and, if necessary, extract a round dozen of teeth, and scarcely expected to find another person ready to witness these delicate operations. But, when the famous practitioner was seated, what was his surprise to see Cowslip come "purring" across the office with a pair of handcuffs clinking between his fingers. He started up with a cry of alarm. What! another Mystery? Was the great crime to be laid to the account of the most spotless dentist of all the Australias! No, gentle reader, it was only a little freak; the man of genius, like the doctor, had come laden with his engines of torture, and was ready for any emergency.

Dr. Shinbone's evident dismay caused much amusement, and was a fitting prelude to the gloomy proceedings that were to ensue.

Caldron sat upon his eminent chair, and had the other "three" persons arranged before him "in a semi-circle." It was a marvellous performance under the circumstances, and reflected high credit to their ingenuity. Three persons to form a semi-circle!

Then the illustrious one opened proceedings.

"Dr. Shinbone," said he, in his most grandiose manner, "as the greatest lawyer of Australia, it affords me the keenest sensation of pleasure to be associated with a man of science of your ability and standing, as joint executor, together with Mr. O'Brier, to the will of a murderer and boiler of infants!"

"A murderer? Boiler of infants? Do you allude to my departed friend, Frank Frecklenose, sir?" shrieked Dr. Shinbone.

"We do! we do!" gloomily assented Fitzdoodle and the lawyer.

"How dare you defile the memory of a man whom I revere?"

"Alas! too true," broke in Caldron. "We positively affirm, and swear upon our bended knees, that Frank Frecklenose murdered Oliver Black. Fitzdoodle, will you swear?"

"We swear—we swear!" solemnly cried the two gentlemen.

"Here is his confession——" continued the lawyer.

"Have you read it?" Dr. Shinbone broke in.

"No!" cried Caldron, firmly. "What need to read it, when the proofs of guilt are conclusive? We prefer to throw aside all doubts and misgivings, and brand our dear departed Frecklenose as a dastardly murderer! And this detective is here in order that we may satisfy him as to the committal of the crime!"

"Not till I've arrested him!" "purred" the man of genius.

"In my opinion you cannot do so," said Caldron, thoughtfully, "as the murderer is dead; but I'll look up the matter in my *Vade Mecum*."

"I was referring to *my* murderer—Podger Lessland," said Cowslip, angrily. "I'm not going to be done out of *my* man for the sake of a trumpery confession!"

"That's an excellent idea of yours, detective," said the doctor, highly pleased; "and the next decayed tooth that troubles you I shall undertake to draw for nothing!—Podger Lessland's a much more likely party."

"No! a thousand times no!" cried Caldron, white with passion. "Heaven knows I loved pa Frecklenose with filial affection—a great, undying love, but I maintain, without so much as giving him the ghost of a chance by a perusal of this confession, that he was a black-hearted, cowardly, dastardly Gabberberoo-like Baby-Boiler and Murderer!"

"Read the confession!" cried the doctor.

"No!" again burst out Caldron, "can't you appreciate, purblind jaw-smasher that you are, the exigencies of Australian romance? Don't you see that while we are here—I, the illustrious barrister, and you, three nincom-

poops in a semi-circle—discussing this awful, horrible, blood-curdling crime; needlessly accusing our dead friend without reference to his written confession—don't you see that another chapter of an imperishable work is being slowly written?"

"I see, I see," murmured the doctor; "but still, it's rather hard on poor old Frecklenose!"

"I was quite agreed with Cowslip," said the lawyer, more calmly, "that there was an excellent case against Lessland, and, in fact, we had arranged for his arrest. Since then Cowslip has found the dead man's coat up a tree—which accounts for all our previous calculations being 'up a tree,' too; he has found the chloroform bottle—and the contents were supplied to him, it would seem, by no less a person than Dr. Shinbone himself."

"Me?" cried the doctor.

"Him?" ejaculated Fitzdoodle.

"He?" purred the man of genius.

"Aye!" triumphantly assented the lawyer. "Yes! It was labelled 'For External Use only.' That's, no doubt, why Frecklenose applied the medicament to the corpse's nose—he thought he could evade the law! I admit there are strong evidences against Lessland, but——"

"Read the confession!" interposed the doctor.

"But, really, some little respect should have been shown us. We have been baffled, put off the scent——"

"Read the confession!" groaned the dentist.

"Subjected to all kinds of tricks and *tours de romancier*, such as——"

"Read the confession!" shrieked the illustrious practitioner, seizing Caldron by the hair.

"Such as Gubberohio only would have——"

"Read the confession!" yelled Dr. Shinbone, dashing the contents of the inkpot over the eminent lawyer's head.

"——Gubberohioivo alone would have dared to——"

"Read the confession!" screeched the poor doctor, smashing the cryptogram upon the barrister's skull.

"——Dared to devise. All right! doctor, your impatience is most unseemly, I consider."

Then, unfolding Frank Frecklenose's "memoirs," he read what the dead man had written.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE CONFESSIONS OF A BABY-BOILER.

"I TAKE up my Pen to shed lite on Certain sercumstances closely allide to the great *Mistery of a Wheel-barrow.* Fitzdoodle O'Brier, who wos Accuzed of the dredful crime knows as Much about it as me. When he goes Singin around, "He knows—he knows!" like a paitent-medsine advertisement it Makes me feel sick, and I wish I hadn't never Had nothin to do with the concern. But that's neither hear nor there. i take up my Pen to Make a full and candied confession of all What I know.

"If anybody wants to Make this confession public I've got nothing to Say. I've been in the public line Nerely Most of my life, and don't think I'm afrade of Being made a public caracter when I shall be no more! If my dere daughter Peggy don't like it, I'm Verry sorry. She's allways been good to her Pore pa.

"Fourgive Me if I wipe away a tere. I leeve my memory in her Hands and arsk her to dele leniently with it, and excuse bad Spellin.

"I could curtale this Confesshon if I liked, but I Prefer to rite a lot. The poet loriate says—it is a "Sad mecanic ecsersise," and as Peggy's attendin to the Cusstomers I'll slip into it.

"When in my boyoods Early years they consisted in bein an Office boy. My dooties was Insignifickant. So was my salery. I determind to rise in The world. I've since Riz. But o the wate of wo upon my Aged hares!

"My nature Wos sterred with the poitry of adventure. I longed to scim the broad Canadean rivers on 'harebredth skates' as Shakespear beutifully Says. I sighed for fredom on my office Stool and resolved to have it at any cost. So one satturday, as I Put my weakly

pittence in my Trowzers pockets I bid a dew to my emploier who Was out at dinner and Started on my noo carear. I had borowed a trifeling sum from my emploier befour I left my Irksum toile. He was out at dinner, and I sinserely hope he never mist it.

"I floo to Australia on the Wings of Hope. I wos very sea-sic I Remember. But that's niether hear nor there. I floo next to the diggins, made a little Money, and gave up Those diggins. The sosiety of diggers Wos not conjeneal to my sole, which was pining for the fre wild life of the woods. So I Bought a station. I had borowed a little money from a corse vulgar gold digger Who had gone up country For a day. He was a low man. I hope he Never mist it. One day as I Mused in solitood in my station I came to the concloosion that After all said and done I was only a gregareous Animal. My sheep was dyin with the rot and my Cow was off colour, so I bid a dew for a time to nature and came to Melbourne. I had Soled some carves which had straid away to my station. He wos a good naybour and I hope he never mist them. Then, I enjoyed Myself in Melbourne. I wosn't a Joseph nor I wosn't a St. Anthony so I enjoyed myself thorowly. I got quite Boemian in My habets, and carried dissipation so far as to have suppers in the small Howers of the morning! We had a rare time, tho I blush when I rite it in these memores. Youth and the flo-ing bole, wine (or spirits for Them that prefered them) rained supreme! Wit and Humer also. But thats niether here nor there. Love at last Pearced my heart. Peggy's calling me for something so I must Pauze for awile. Love smiled at Last upon me. She only wanted me To tap a Four-ale so I can now go on. Her name was Miss Susannah Burgess. She had an engagment At the theater in a bally. But that's niether hear nor there. I want to tell you in these Memores of the awfull catastrofee which imbittered all my life tho I wos Not a Joseph nor a St. anthony. At this time my funds wos getting Low, So I cast around for to find some sure way of borowing money without Payin it back. I couldn't raize a stiver so I made A speculasion which has Been the bain of my existance. I bought a recipee. I don't think there Was much in it, for the sheep and other cattel it was used on

lost their hare Awfull. But that's niether hear nor there. I went back to my station to run my "wash" wich Was composed of armless hurbs and grasses. This was the recipee :—

Acid Sulf	. . .	3 oz.
Acid Hydrochl	. .	2 oz.
Straw	. . .	½ lb.
Caraway Seed	. .	1 oz.
Water	. . .	2 qts.

"I bought it of a young Medical stoodent in Melbourne who disappeared Immejiately afterwards. But that's niether hear nor there. I soled the recipee long Ago (alarse! only the copy) to the Noo Zealand Goverment. o the wo it has brought upon my Aged hares! Now, Susannah Burgess bein Off dooty, came up country on a visit. Not bein a joseph I suppose she Saw no real harm in trifeling with my feelins. My naybour whos Carves I have mistaken for my own was Sweet on Susannah too, and between me And you who reed these memores I think he new something about them carves. But that's niether hear nor there. One day we three was walkin Together and I notised they were Laughin' in secrit. Alarse! wood they laugh now With this truble on my Aged hares. But that's Niether hear nor there. That afternoon I was fixin up my cattel-wash in the usual Way cattel-washes is prepaired—in a Caldron. This is no allusion to my Honored frend the immment barister of that name. But that's niether hear nor there. I had just got the water Boiling with the ingrediants nice And pulpy when my naybour called me a side. Shortly after I terned round and Saw susannah lyin on the ground. We rusht up To the spot and found she was in a swoon. Then my naybour All at once gave a shreek. 'Monster!' he cried, 'what enormerty hast thou Comitted? Look!' He Pointed to the Caldron. There, simmerin gently with the hurbs And grasses, was the body of a—black child! o the wo that nigger brat has brought upon these Aged hares! But that's—Peggy's calling me again —niether hear nor there. I fell upon My nees in Angwish. 'Inuman retch!' he cride again, 'show me the recipee!'

Tremblin like a naspen leaf i tore open my brest Pockit and prodooced the documant. There, sure Enough, in lines of fire upon the recipee, I red the words :—

BOILED BLACK BABY—*Suffit.*

"If I never Speak again, I swair I am innocent of that Grate crime. I don't no how it came there—it must have Dropt in ! My naybour Mounted his hoarse to ride for the police.' I emplored him on my Nees to believe me innosent--but to No purpus. I felt that I was doomed. Then he concented to akcept a sum of money and remane silent. I gave him all I had, and he burried the littel black corps that night. But thats neither hear nor there. Susannah sperned me with lothing. Shortly after I herd she was Married to my naybour and had gone to England. Wether they were *really* married i no not. But that's niether hear nor there.

"I continude to run my wash With success but Without the fatal ingredient !

"My subsequant carear you know.

"I married—a angel unawares. Peggy was My only ofspring. Years rolled On. My welth increesed. I was happy, untill the lamented Mrs. Frecklenose went to a better spere ! Fourgive this tere ! But that's niether hear nor there. That black baby which Had been hangin over my hed like a Sord of Dammocles was almost forgotten, when lo ! it came Down upon my Aged hares !

"That villin, Oliver Black—*der mortu iss nil nicey bone em*—came like a dred shape upon me. He had met Susannah in London, where she Was in a *Corpse de bally* as she used to call it. She held the original recipee and proposed to come to melbourne to extort my hard-erned money.

"O how the scoundril Thrust that boiled black baby in my face at every moment—dangled the dammed boiled Thing (forgive me gentle reader of these Memores) befour me at every turn, until I longged for his Deth ! I can never say Wot dredful thoughts came into my head sometimes when Oliver was Drinkin my stuff and Smokin my cigars and Borrowin money from my till ! Until one day he gits my consent to marry peggy. But rooin was Staring

me in the Face—and the Verry nite I told him he mite do his wurst, Black was murdered in a Wheel-barrow, and i brethed again! Nothing more was herd about the recipee until only A day or two ago that arch-fiend Podger Lessland comes to my Shop with the fatal paper in his possession. He had sloo his friend for the sake of the recipee! He thretened to Drag me fourth to justice and old me up to the Finger of scorn. I don't know how many babies I was at last acused of boiling. Lessland was ready to Sware I used one for every Two quarts; and that I'd sloo some fifty or sixty! At last I gave him money and Let him have his drinks for nothing. But lor! he seres my very sole With his alloosions To those boiled babies. He sings out 'Babies, all ot!' and 'Baked and Boiled Babies, all ot, all ot!' and so on, till my Aged hares won't stand it any longer—so I must die! But that's neither hear nor there. The secrit may be reveeled at any Moment, and my Caracter rooined.

"The exigencies of the great romance in wich Victorian litteratoore has called me to play a Part Requires my presence no longger. The great Mystery is nerely at an end. If I 'ave sinned my Temtations have been strong, and I ave had villins to dele with. But that's neither hear nor there. My daughter peggy must fourgive her pa, and drop a Tear upon his beer.

"The weight of wo upon my Aged hares is somethink tremengious!

"A dew, a dew,

"FRANK FRECKLENOSE.

"P.S.—I think he new somethink about them Carves."

CHAPTER XXXII.

MR. LESSLAND OBLIGES.

WHILE the last pathetic words were being read the semi-circle was dissolved in tears. Cowslip wept upon the shoulder of the eminent dentist, and Fitzdoodle shed passionate tears of grief in the illustrious lawyer's top-hat.

"Well," spluttered Dr. Shinbone, his voice choked with eminent emotion, "you see now, Mr. Caldron, that I was right in using a little gentle persuasion. My poor dead friend is as innocent as the little black nigger that has caused us all this bother."

"Yes," returned the illustrious barrister; "I was sure of his innocence."

"And I too," put in Fitzdoodle; "nothing would ever have made me believe in the blood-guiltiness of the esteemed antique Frecklenose!"

The Cowslip purred assent to these generous words.

"We shall have to resort to our previous assassin," he said, at length, with a cat-like smile.

"Yes, yes," said Caldron, "by all means; we can't keep up the excitement much longer."

"Certainly," broke in O'Brier; "couldn't think of allowing a dangerous criminal to escape from any mistaken notion of sentiment."

"You weren't so precious sentimental about poor old Frecklenose," said the dentist, with a sneer.

"Very likely; but, you see, we must settle this business once for all, or we shall leave open some possibility of continuing this mysterious romance through several volumes."

A deadly pallor overspread the faces of the semi-circle.

"Heaven forbid it!" cried the detective, who was the first to regain his equanimity.

"Now that it is finally settled that Lessland is to be arrested," said Caldron, starting from a reverie, "how are we to proceed? Shall we all adjourn to the 'Kilted

Opossum' and wait till he calls for his daily contingent of liquor?"

"That's a goodly suggestion," said Dr. Shinbone; "but I have a better one. Suppose we drop him a post-card (in the interests of the public we should spare no expense), and inform him that Mr. Frecklenose's executors have an important legacy to hand over to him——"

"Excellent! Capital idea!" cried the three listeners.

"I think I can even save the expense of the post-card," purred Mr. Cowslip.

"How?" cried the dentist and the lawyer, together. The three men were breathless with excitement.

"Why, telephone to Peggy at the 'Kilted Opossum' to send Lessland here as soon as he comes in."

The three rose, and in turn shook the detective by the hand, with a "silent smile" of admiration upon their faces. While the man of thought stepped across the road in order to waylay a telephone capable of transmitting his message, the illustrious trio sat and talked about the strange termination of the great Wheel-barrow Mystery.

"What a remarkable situation for a drama!" said Fitzdoodle. "Lying in wait for the assassin! Australia's greatest dentist and most illustrious lawyer, together with her only Fitzdoodle, waiting collectedly for the appearance of the blood-stained murderer!"

"It is indeed a thrilling situation!" said Dr. Shinbone. "Is it not wonderful to think that it should be wasted in the pages of a shilling shocker? There's nothing to touch it in Shakespeare!"

"I'm getting quite excited," broke out Caldron. "I can't sit still any longer. I must give you a solo, or a hornpipe, or something."

The men rose simultaneously, and were soon engaged in an elaborate *pas de trois*, in which the illustrious dentist showed remarkable agility. Tall and stately, though slender to a fault, the doctor presented a striking appearance as his legs wandered in mid air over the heads of the other performers, and Fitzdoodle's high-kicking was a credit to our great and rising colony.

"Have studied Gabbereaux all my life," said Caldron,

pirouetting round the room on *pointes*, "and never read anything so exciting as present situation."

"Nor I," panted the illustrious dentist, throwing his right leg adroitly over Fitzdoodle's head.

The man of genius now returned with the news that the murderer was on his way. Much thought had perhaps rendered Cowslip's limbs somewhat stiff, but he nevertheless joined in the whirling dance with creditable enthusiasm; and the stirring quadrille performed by the eminent barrister and Fitzdoodle facing the illustrious dentist and the man of thought, had it been witnessed by any reasonable admirer of Victorian fiction, would have been accounted one of the most splendid successes of Terpsichorean Science ever devised by the fertile brain and legs of man.

The excitement, however, could not last much longer at that high pitch. The man of thought, in an endeavour to rival Dr. Shinbone in pliability of nether limb, had nearly brained the hero of our remarkable story, when Lessland appeared.

The aristocrat smiled and bowed to the dancers, and, without further introduction, executed a series of aerial gyrations eclipsing the efforts of the dentist himself. After a final galop the dance was abandoned for more serious business.

"I'm hearty glad to see you, sir," said Caldron; "be good enough to close and double lock the door, Mr. Cowslip, and we will proceed with the arrest. Now, Mr. Lessland, allow me to introduce you to my friends—Dr. Shinbone, the illustrious dentist; Mr. Cowslip, the greatest detective since Lecoq; and Mr. Fitzoodle O'Brier."

"D—n your friends!" cried Lessland. "I suppose you think this a capital joke, don't you? to entrap a gentleman in a manner scarcely creditable to professed students of Gabero!"

Lessland made a spring at the detective's throat, "just for form's sake," he said, and the two men struggled and fell. A semi-circle was formed, and proceedings were watched with considerable interest and amusement. Lessland finally submitted to the bracelets, and "rose sullenly off the floor." The man of genius smiled a seraphic smile.

"I've been a fool," said the aristocrat.

"Not at all," said Caldron, politely, "you have merely complied with the exigencies of romance, and we are all very much obliged to you."

"Thanks," returned Lessland. "I presume I shall have the honour of occupying the prison cell which once sheltered my esteemed friend, Mr. O'Brier."

"Certainly, my dear fellow," said the man of genius, brushing away a tear.

"Thanks," said the aristocrat once more. "I think," he continued, "that the Australian reading public should offer me some return for my services in the Wheel-barrow Mystery. I have observed a necessary silence since the trial of my friend, and, altogether, have played a very insignificant *rôle* in this remarkable drama, solely with the object of intensifying its mystery. Of course I polished off Black in order to make myself master of pa Frecklenose's destiny. I don't say it was my intention to 'do' for my poor friend Black in such a thorough manner. A little dose of chloroform proved too much for him; a very regrettable circumstance, but useful—useful in the interests of Victorian fiction. No questions were asked, and my great grief, on the occasion of my interview with the experienced detective, Mr. Clawby—what are you grinning at, Cowslip?—was sufficient to establish my innocence in the eyes of the world. Did I at once use my power over Frecklenose to extort money? No! it would have simplified matters too much, and made this remarkable drama a miserable farce. No! I kept clean out of these pages, until the exigencies of romance required my presence."

"Yes," said Caldron, shaking the aristocrat warmly by the hand, "I certainly think that the thanks of the Australian public are due to you for your great disinterestedness."

"And also to the corpse," added Dr. Shinbone, gravely; "his *rôle* has been a very insignificant one, and must have been attended with extreme discomfort—a passive *rôle* in the extreme.

"Agreed!" shouted the assembled company. Then Fitzdoodle spoke:

"I should say that some expression of the public sense

of gratitude should be conveyed to another person who has played an important tho' extremely unpleasant *rôle* in this story, and who, if my memory serves me, has never uttered a single word. I allude to the boiled black baby."

Lessland gave a chuckling laugh.

"Your thanks," said he, "can be spared in that direction—the boiled baby was only an india-rubber one—a mere hoax played upon the susceptible pa Frecklenose by Susannah Burgess and a neighbouring squatter!"

This piece of news had a strange effect upon the listeners, who were so unrestrained in their mirth that the prisoner was on the point of leaving them to their hilarity, when he suddenly remembered that his escape might involve another volume of mysteries.

When the laughter had subsided, the entire company joined hands, and Lessland implored an imaginary audience to reward them with their plaudits.

"Stay a moment," said the man of genius, after the usual stage smiles and bows had been done, "you've got to come to gaol, friend!"

Lessland's brow wrinkled angerly.

"Life," he said, "is but a chess-board, after all, and we are but the puppets of fate;" a sentiment which was greatly admired by the company, as highly effective upon the lips of a doomed man.

"Friend," said Dr. Shinbone to the prisoner, "do you know what your end will be?"

"The same old tail," replied the aristocrat, smiling. "I shall be hanged."

"No, you won't," returned the illustrious practitioner. "The exigencies will require of you to commit suicide. I trust you will not fail in your last duty."

"Thanks," said Lessland; "the hint so delicately expressed shall be obeyed."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"HE NEVER WAS MEANT FOR THE SEA."

FITZDOODLE O'BRIER was now prepared for the worst. The trial of Lessland might involve considerable trouble and expense, and the dread secret of boiled babies would become a—*secret de polichinelle*. Yet he accepted it with philosophical resignation and mental calmness. His own name, and that of his beloved Peggy, would be for ever associated with boiled niggers; yet he was callous—so callous, in fact, that he surprised himself. Lessland's trial would disclose everything, and Fitzdoodle's name would appear in the comic papers! Dreadful thought! Peggy would learn that her pa, in early life, was neither a Joseph, nor a St. Anthony, and certain *péchés mignons* in connection with Madame Mudlark's daughter, Susannah Burgess, would be discussed by the Melbourne aristocracy in no very charitable mood. Poor Peggy! But Fitzdoodle had resolved to marry her at once, after the burial of her worthy father, and, the trial over, to fly for ever from the realm of topsy-turveydom.

Public curiosity was already rife as to the anticipated confession of the murderer of Oliver Black, when lo! there happened a strange thing—Lessland, in obedience to the exigencies of which we have spoken more than once, saved the hangman the trouble of suspending him by hanging himself in his cell, without even a written explanation of that blackguardly proceeding. The *Daily Muddler* was loud in its denunciation of the obliging Lessland, and after four editions of that enterprising print had been issued, the Editorial intellect was completely unhinged.

It may be easily imagined that Fitzdoodle was overjoyed on hearing of the event. He invited his eminent legal friend, the illustrious dentist and the man of genius

to a special tripe supper, prepared by papa Topweight, at the termination of which repast conviviality had reached such a pitch that Dr. Shinbone extracted two incisors from the jawbone of the man of genius, in illustration of his manner of commencing a *post mortem* examination, and the man of genius only became aware of the fact on the morrow. It is further recorded that the eminent barrister, with the aid of his immortal *Vade Mecum*, tried and condemned to death a fine calf's-head, for a libel on a distinguished personage.

Cowslip was provided with a sum of money to hush the dreadful secret of boiled babies; and the man of genius, shortly after, espoused the founder of the Rawkinites, and took over the premises, stock, and goodwill of the "Kilted Opossum," whereto flocked, as of yore, the aristocracy of St. Kilda, whom the profound thinker thrilled with narratives *à la* Gaberiorioeau, principally in connection with the remarkable Wheel-barrow Mystery.

Mr. Tol-de-Rolleston did finally get into Parliament, and made brilliant speeches on police matters. On these important occasions he would array his little person in the most picturesque disguises, and would return home to his charming wife so "disguised" that she recognised him immediately. Mr. Tol-de-Rolleston ultimately lost his "seat," owing to the indiscreet attentions of a large mastiff attached to the House of Assembly. He retired from public life, and became editor of the *Daily Muddler*.

When Peggy had recovered from her illness, and disposed of the lease of the "Kilted Opossum," she was quietly married to the long-suffering O'Brier; and together they left Australia and the pages of romance for ever.

Standing with her husband on the deck of a homebound steamer, she watched the slowly fading shores of her native land—the land of boiled babies and affliction. The sinking sun glared with anger upon the heavy waters; the flaring red-light in its eye was anything but enjoyable to look at.

Peggy's eyes filled with tears, and Fitzdoodle was very pale.

"Ahdew! ahdew! my native land, ahdew!" said Peggy, with a passionate storm of sighs.

"Ah, do! ah, do! what talking about dearsh? I feel *sho* ill!"

She seized his hand—it was cold as that of a serpent!

"Do you regret?" she said.

"O dearsh, you really must excuse me forramomen'. I never was meant for the sea, dearsh, I never was—excuse me momen'."

Fitzdoodle staggered to the side of the noble vessel.

"Do you regret, dearest?" again said Peggy, when her husband had come back to her side. "Our hearts have been tried in the cauldron of affliction."

"O don't, Peggy; you remind me of these confoun' babies—excuse me a momen'."

When Fitzdoodle stood once more by his young wife's side, Peggy murmured softly, "After the pain and torture of the past, let us trust, darling, that the days to come——"

"Excuse me a momen', dearsh."

"Will bring peace," continued Peggy, after the lapse of some moments.

"Peace!"

A gull rose from the crimson waters, and circled in the air.

"A happy omen!" said Peggy.

"Yesh——excuse me a momen'."

The mighty vessel moved slowly onward thro' the surging waters.

Gentle reader—excuse me for a moment.

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MYSTERIOUS.

The Alarming Nature of Unseen Dangers Accounted for.



"I FEAR no evil that I can see," exclaimed Napoleon, and his acts proved the truth of his philosophy. He could face danger in every form; but the sunken road of Waterloo was an *unseen* foe greater than the armies around him. This same principle seems true with most people. We fear the unseen; we dread the unknown; we shrink from that which possesses the power to harm.

In the midst of so much mystery and so many unseen dangers we naturally feel a sense of awe. We wonder if some small portion of the human machinery should get out of order what the result would be; and we fear disaster from powers we cannot comprehend. It is natural we should do so! It is reasonable we should ask what the result would be if the million tissues of the lungs, liver, or kidneys, should become disordered. A slight excess, a careless attention to the details of health, apparently does no harm, but it none the less undermines the life. It is a draft upon vitality which must be honoured in the future.

But our own neglect is by no means all the unseen injuries that come to the human system. There are a thousand evil influences all around us at war with our lives. They are inhaled into the lungs, and poison the blood; they are absorbed through the skin and foster disease; they are devoured with the food, and corrode the most important organs of the body. The man or woman who possesses the power to counteract all these evil influences has obtained a secret of untold value. The lungs, heart, liver, and kidneys can very easily become weakened; and how? By these very abuses and strains that are constantly brought to bear upon them. It is necessary to guard these organs, and preserve their proper tone at all times.

While the most serious evils which afflict man and womankind are those which arise from disordered kidneys, they are diseases which can be controlled if taken in time. The truth is that they are "unseen evils," and the primary danger arises from the fact that the symptoms they manifest are not recognised, but are attributable to some minor disorder, which, by being considered slight, is permitted to fasten itself upon the system. That more than one-half of physical disorders arise from impaired kidneys is a settled fact, and that their disorders can be prevented by using "Warner's SAFE CURE" is equally true. Thousands of people, including prominent physicians, scientists, and divines, who have known of its wonderful powers, indorse and recommend it. Chemists throughout the world sell it; and the opportunity for thus obtaining its benefits are brought near to every one. It will solve the mystery of good health, and keep back the day on which comes "the great mystery."

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